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WILD ORANGES

by

Joseph Hergesheimer

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WILD ORANGES

By JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

One evening John Woolfolk and his trusty sailor, sailing to South America, put into a lonely bay in Southern Georgia. The shore is a wilderness of wild orange trees, and hidden among them is an ancient, decaying Southern mansion. Here live a lovely girl, her half-insane old father, and a queer servant who seems to hold some strange power over them. The story concerns how John Woolfolk rescued this girl from her mysterious and unhappy environment, and during the course of this rescue there takes place one of the most thrilling fights ever chronicled. One reviewer says of the story: "One of the greatest stories which has appeared in America. Poe never wrote anything better. It has literary charm. It has atmosphere. It has that peculiar mysterious quality, difficult to define, which makes it haunt one for days after reading."

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WILD ORANGES

King Vidor's "Wild Oranges." *A Goldwyn Picture.*

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.

WILD ORANGES

BY

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES FROM
KING VIDOR'S PHOTOPLAY
A GOLDWYN PICTURE

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TO
GEORGE HORACE LORIMER

WILD ORANGES

I

THE ketch drifted into the serene inclosure of the bay as silently as the reflections moving over the mirrorlike surface of the water. Beyond a low arm of land that hid the sea the western sky was a single, clear yellow; farther on the left the pale, incalculably old limbs of cypress, their roots bare, were hung with gathering shadows as delicate as their own faint foliage. The stillness was emphasized by the ceaseless murmur of the waves breaking on the far, seaward bars.

John Woolfolk brought the ketch up where he intended to anchor and called to the stooping white-clad figure in the bow: "Let go!" There was an answering splash, a sudden rasp of hawser, the booms swung idle, and the yacht imperceptibly settled into her berth. The wheel turned impotently; and, absent-minded, John Woolfolk locked it. He dropped his long form on a carpet-covered folding chair near by. He was tired. His sailor, Poul Halvard, moved about with a noiseless and swift efficiency; he rolled and cased the jib, and then, with a handful of canvas stops, secured and covered the mainsail and proceeded aft

to the jigger. Unlike Woolfolk, Halvard was short—a square figure with a smooth, deep-tanned countenance, colorless and steady, pale blue eyes. His mouth closed so tightly that it appeared immovable, as if it had been carved from some obdurate material that opened for the necessities of neither speech nor sustenance.

Tall John Woolfolk was darkly tanned, too, and had a grey gaze, by turns sharply focused with bright black pupils and blankly introspective. He was garbed in white flannels, with bare ankles and sandals, and an old, collarless silk shirt, with sleeves rolled back on virile arms incongruously tattooed with gauzy green cicadas.

He stayed motionless while Halvard put the yacht in order for the night. The day's passage through twisting inland waterways, the hazard of the tides on shifting flats, the continual concentration on details at once trivial and highly necessary, had been more wearing than the cyclone the ketch had weathered off Barbuda the year before. They had been landbound since dawn; and all day John Woolfolk's instinct had revolted against the fields and wooded points, turning toward the open sea.

Halvard disappeared into the cabin; and, soon after, a faint, hot air, the smell of scorched metal, announced the lighting of the vapor stove, the preparations for supper. Not a breath stirred the surface of the bay. The water, as transparently clear

as the hardly darkened air, lay like a great amethyst clasped by its dim corals and the arm of the land. The glossy foliage that, with the exception of a small silver beach, choked the shore might have been stamped from metal. It was, John Woolfolk suddenly thought, amazingly still. The atmosphere, too, was peculiarly heavy, languorous. It was laden with the scents of exotic, flowering trees; he recognized the smooth, heavy odor of oleanders and the clearer sweetness of orange blossoms.

He was idly surprised at the latter; he had not known that orange groves had been planted and survived in Georgia. Woolfolk gazed more attentively at the shore, and made out, in back of the luxuriant tangle, the broad white façade of a dwelling. A pair of marine glasses lay on the deck at his hand; and, adjusting them, he surveyed the face of a distinguished ruin. The windows on the stained wall were broken in—they resembled the empty eyes of the dead; storms had battered loose the neglected roof, leaving a corner open to sun and rain; he could see through the foliage lower down great columns fallen about a sweeping portico.

The house was deserted, he was certain of that—the melancholy wreckage of a vanished and resplendent time. Its small principality, flourishing when commerce and communication had gone by water, was one of the innumerable victims of progress and of the concentration of effort into huge impersonalities. He thought he could trace other

even more complete ruins, but his interest waned. He laid the glasses back upon the deck. The choked bubble of boiling water sounded from the cabin, mingled with the irregular sputter of cooking fat and the clinking of plates and silver as Halvard set the table. Without, the light was fading swiftly; the wavering cry of an owl quivered from the cypress across the water, and the western sky changed from paler yellow to green. Woolfolk moved abruptly, and, securing a bucket to the handle of which a short rope had been spliced and finished with an ornamental Turk's-head, he swung it overboard and brought it up half full. In the darkness of the bucket the water shone with a faint phosphorescence. Then from a basin he lathered his hands with a thick, pinkish paste, washed his face, and started toward the cabin.

He was already in the companionway when, glancing across the still surface of the bay, he saw a swirl moving into view about a small point. He thought at first that it was a fish, but the next moment saw the white, graceful silhouette of an arm. It was a woman swimming. John Woolfolk could now plainly make out the free, solid mass of her hair, the naked, smoothly turning shoulder. She was swimming with deliberate ease, with a long, single overarm stroke; and it was evident that she had not seen the ketch. Woolfolk stood, his gaze level with the cabin top, watching her assured progress. She turned again, moving out from the

shore, then suddenly stopped. Now, he realized, she saw him.

The swimmer hung motionless for a breath; then, with a strong, sinuous drive, she whirled about and made swiftly for the point of land. She was visible for a short space, low in the water, her hair wavering in the clear flood, and then disappeared abruptly behind the point, leaving behind—a last vanishing trace of her silent passage—a smooth, subsiding wake on the surface of the bay.

John Woolfolk mechanically descended the three short steps to the cabin. There had been something extraordinary in the woman's brief appearance out of the odorous tangle of the shore, with its ruined habitation. It had caught him unprepared, in a moment of half weary relaxation, and his imagination responded with a faint question to which it had been long unaccustomed. But Halvard, in crisp white, standing behind the steaming supper viands, brought his thoughts again to the day's familiar routine.

The cabin was divided through its forward half by the centerboard casing, and against it a swinging table had been elevated, an immaculate cover laid, and the yacht's china, marked in cobalt with the name *Gar*, placed in a polished and formal order. Halvard's service from the stove to the table was as silent and skillful as his housing of the sails; he replaced the hot dishes with cold, and provided a glass bowl of translucent preserved figs.

Supper at an end, Woolfolk rolled a cigarette from shag that resembled coarse black tea and returned to the deck. Night had fallen on the shore, but the water still held a pale light; in the east the sky was filled with an increasing, cold radiance. It was the moon, rising swiftly above the flat land. The moonlight grew in intensity, casting inky shadows of the spars and cordage across the deck, making the light in the cabin a reddish blur by contrast. The icy flood swept over the land, bringing out with a new emphasis the close, glossy foliage and broken façade—it appeared unreal, portentous. The odors of the flowers, of the orange blossoms, uncoiled in heavy, palpable waves across the water, accompanied by the owl's fluctuating cry. The sense of imminence increased, of a *genius loci* unguessed and troublous, vaguely threatening in the perfumed dark.

II

JOHN WOOLFOLK had said nothing to Halvard of the woman he had seen swimming in the bay. He was conscious of no particular reason for remaining silent about her; but the thing had become invested with a glamour that, he felt, would be destroyed by commonplace discussion. He had no personal interest in the episode, he was careful to add. Interests of that sort, serving to connect him with the world, with society, with women, had totally disappeared from his life. He rolled and lighted a fresh cigarette, and in the minute orange spurt of the match his mouth was somber and forbidding.

The unexpected appearance on the glassy water had merely started into being a slight, fanciful curiosity. The women of that coast did not commonly swim at dusk in their bays; such simplicity obtained now only in the reaches of the highest civilization. There were, he knew, no hunting camps here, and the local inhabitants were mere sodden squatters. A chart lay in its flat canvas case by the wheel; and, in the crystal flood of the moon, he easily reaffirmed from it his knowledge of the yacht's pos-

ition. Nothing could be close by but scattered huts and such wreckage as that looming palely above the oleanders.

Yet a woman had unquestionably appeared swimming from behind the point of land off the bow of the *Gar*. The women native to the locality, and the men, too, were fanatical in the avoidance of any unnecessary exterior application of water. His thoughts moved in a monotonous circle, while the enveloping radiance constantly increased. It became as light as a species of unnatural day, where every leaf was clearly revealed but robbed of all color and familiar meaning.

He grew restless, and rose, making his way forward about the narrow deck-space outside the cabin. Halvard was seated on a coil of rope beside the windlass and stood erect as Woolfolk approached. The sailor was smoking a short pipe, and the bowl made a crimson spark in his thick, powerful hand. John Woolfolk fingered the wood surface of the windlass bitts and found it rough and gummy. Halvard said instinctively:

"I'd better start scraping the mahogany tomorrow, it's getting white."

Woolfolk nodded. Halvard was a good man. He had the valuable quality of commonly anticipating spoken desires. He was a Norwegian, out of the Lofoden Islands, where sailors are surpassingly schooled in the Arctic seas. Poul Halvard, so far as Woolfolk could discover, was impervious to cold, to

King Vidor's "Wild Oranges."

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.

A Goldwyn Picture.

fatigue, to the insidious whispering of mere flesh. He was a man without temptation, with an untroubled allegiance to a duty that involved an endless, exacting labor; and for those reasons he was austere, withdrawn from the community of more fragile and sympathetic natures. At times his inflexible integrity oppressed John Woolfolk. Halvard, he thought, was a difficult man to live up to.

He turned and absently surveyed the land. His restlessness increased. He felt a strong desire for a larger freedom of space than that offered by the *Gar,* and it occurred to him that he might go ashore in the tender. He moved aft with this idea growing to a determination. In the cabin, on the shelf above the berths built against the sides of the ketch, he found an old blue flannel coat, with crossed squash rackets and a monogram embroidered in yellow on the breast pocket. Slipping it on, he dropped over the stern of the tender.

Halvard came instantly aft, but Woolfolk declined the mutely offered service. The oars made a silken swish in the still bay as he pulled away from the yacht. The latter's riding light, swung on the forestay, hung without a quiver, like a fixed yellow star. He looked once over his shoulder, and then the bow of the tender ran with a soft shock upon the beach. Woolfolk bedded the anchor in the sand and then stood gazing curiously before him.

On his right a thicket of oleanders drenched the air with the perfume of their heavy poisonous

III

HE advanced more slowly, and a low, irregular house detached itself from the tangled growth pressing upon it from all sides. The doorway, dimly lighted by an invisible lamp from within, was now near by; and John Woolfolk saw a shape cross it, so swiftly furtive that it was gone before he realized that a man had vanished into the hall. There was a second stir on the small covered portico, and the slender, white-clad figure of a woman moved uncertainly forward. He stopped just at the moment in which a low, clear voice demanded: "What do you want?"

The question was directly put, and yet the tone held an inexplicably acute apprehension. The woman's voice bore a delicate, bell-like shiver of fear.

"Nothing," he hastened to assure her. "When I came ashore I thought no one was living here."

"You're from the white boat that sailed in at sunset?"

"Yes," he replied, "and I am returning immediately."

"It was like magic!" she continued. "Suddenly, without a sound, you were anchored in the bay."

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On his right a thicket of oleanders drenched the air with the perfume of their heavy poisonous

flowering, and behind them a rough clearing of saw grass swept up to the débris of the fallen portico. To the left, beyond the black hole of a decaying well, rose the walls of a second brick building, smaller than the dwelling. A few shreds of rotten porch clung to its face; and the moonlight, pouring through a break above, fell in a livid bar across the obscurity of a high single chamber.

Between the crumbling piles there was the faint trace of a footway, and Woolfolk advance to where, inside a dilapidated sheltering fence, he came upon a dark, compact mass of trees and smelled the increasing sweetness of orange blossoms. He struck the remains of a board path, and progressed with the cold, waxen leaves of the orange trees brushing his face. There was, he saw in the grey brightness, ripe fruit among the branches, and he mechanically picked an orange and then another. They were small but heavy, and had fine skins.

He tore one open and put a section in his mouth. It was at first surprisingly bitter, and he involuntarily flung away what remained in his hand. But after a moment he found that the oranges possessed a pungency and zestful flavor that he had tasted in no others. Then he saw, directly before him, a pale, rectangular light which he recognized as the opened door of a habitation.

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magnetic woman with the echo of apprehension in her cultivated voice, the parent, so easily disturbed, even the mere name "Nicholas," all held a marked potentiality of emotion; they were set in an almost hysterical key.

He was suddenly conscious of the odorous pressure of the flowering trees, of the orange blossoms and the oleanders. It was stifling. He felt that he must escape at once, from all the cloying and insidious scents of the earth, to the open and sterile sea. The thick tangle in the colorless light of the moon, the dimmer portico with its enigmatic figure, were a cunning essence of the existence from which he had fled. Life's traps were set with just such treacheries—perfume and mystery and the veiled lure of sex.

He rose with an uncouth abruptness, a meager commonplace, and hurried over the path to the beach, toward the refuge, the release, of the *Gar*.

John Woolfolk woke at dawn. A thin, bluish light filled the cabin; above, Halvard was washing the deck. The latter was vigorously swabbing the cockpit when Woolfolk appeared, but he paused.

"Perhaps," the sailor said, "you will stay here for a day or two. I'd like to unship the propeller, and there's the scraping. It's a good anchorage."

"We're moving on south," Woolfolk replied, stating the determination with which he had retired. Then the full sense of Halvard's words penetrated

his waking mind. The propeller, he knew, had not opened properly for a week; and the anchorage was undoubtedly good. This was the last place, before entering the Florida passes, for whatever minor adjustments were necessary.

The matted shore, flushed with the rising sun, was starred with white and deep pink blooms; a ray gilded the blank wall of the deserted mansion. The scent of the orange blossoms was not so insistent as it had been on the previous evening. The land appeared normal; it exhibited none of the disturbing influence of which he had been first conscious. Last night's mood seemed absurd.

"You are quite right," he altered his pronouncement; "we'll put the *Gar* in order here. People are living behind the grove, and there'll be water."

He had, for breakfast, oranges brought down the coast, and he was surprised at their sudden insipidity. They were little better than faintly sweetened water. He turned and in the pocket of his flannel coat found one of those he had picked the night before. It was as keen as a knife; the peculiar aroma had, without doubt, robbed him of all desire for the cultivated oranges of commerce.

Halvard was in the tender, under the stern of the ketch, when it occurred to John Woolfolk that it would be wise to go ashore and establish his assertion of an adequate water supply. He explained this briefly to the sailor, who put him on the small

shingle of sand. There he turned to the right, moving idly in a direction away from that he had taken before.

He crossed the corner of the demolished abode, made his way through a press of sere cabbage palmettos, and emerged suddenly on the blinding expanse of the sea. The limpid water lay in a bright rim over corrugated and pitted rock, where shallow ultramarine pools spread gardens of sulphur-yellow and rose anemones. The land curved in upon the left; a ruined landing extended over the placid tide, and, seated there with her back toward him, a woman was fishing.

It was, he saw immediately, the woman of the portico. At the moment of recognition she turned, and after a brief inspection, slowly waved her hand. He approached, crossing the openings in the precarious boarding of the landing, until he stood over her. She said:

"There's an old sheepshead under here I've been after for a year. If you'll be very still you can see him."

She turned her face up to him, and he saw that her cheeks were without trace of color. At the same time he reaffirmed all that he felt before with regard to the potent quality of her being. She had a lustrous mass of warm brown hair twisted into a loose knot that had slid forward over a broad, low brow; a pointed chin; and pale, disturbing lips. But her eyes were her most notable feature

—they were widely opened and extraordinary in color; the only similitude that occurred to John Woolfolk was the grey greenness of olive leaves. In them he felt the same foreboding that had shadowed her voice. The fleet passage of her gaze left an indelible impression of an expectancy that was at once a dread and a strangely youthful candor. She was, he thought, about thirty.

She wore now a russet skirt of thin, coarse texture that, like the dress of the evening, took a slim grace from her fine body, and a white waist, frayed from many washings, open upon her smooth, round throat.

"He's usually by this post," she continued, pointing down through the clear gloom of the water.

Woolfolk lowered himself to a position at her side, his gaze following her direction. There, after a moment, he distinguished the sheepshead, barred in black and white, wavering about the piling. His companion was fishing with a short, heavy rod from which time had dissolved the varnish, an ineffectual brass reel that complained shrilly whenever the lead was raised or lowered, and a thick, freely-knotted line.

"You should have a leader," he told her. "The old gentleman can see your line too plainly."

There was a sharp pull, she rapidly turned the handle of the protesting reel, and drew up a gasping, bony fish with extended red wings.

"Another robin!" she cried tragically. "This

is getting serious. Dinner," she informed him, "and not sport, is my object."

He looked out to where a channel made a deep blue stain through the paler cerulean of the sea. The tide, he saw from the piling, was low.

"There should be a rockfish in the pass," he pronounced.

"What good if there is?" she returned. "I couldn't possibly throw out there. And if I could, why disturb a rock with this?" She shook the short awkward rod, the knotted line.

He privately acknowledged the palpable truth of her objections, and rose.

"I've some fishing things on the ketch," he said, moving away. He blew shrilly on a whistle from the beach, and Halvard dropped over the *Gar's* side into the tender.

Woolfolk was soon back on the wharf, stripping the canvas cover from the long cane tip of a fishing rod brilliantly wound with green and vermilion, and fitting it into a dark, silver-capped butt. He locked a capacious reel into place, and, drawing a thin line through agate guides, attached a glistening steel leader and chained hook. Then, adding a freely swinging lead, he picked up the small mullet that lay by his companion.

"Does that have to go?" she demanded. "It's such a slim chance, and it is my only mullet."

He ruthlessly sliced a piece from the silvery side; and, rising and switching his reel's gear, he cast.

The lead swung far out across the water and fell on the farther side of the channel.

"But that's dazzling!" she exclaimed; "as though you had shot it out of a gun."

He tightened the line, and sat with the rod resting in a leather socket fastened to his belt.

"Now," she stated, "we will watch at the vain sacrifice of an only mullet."

The day was superb, the sky sparkled like a great blue sun; schools of young mangrove snappers swept through the pellucid water. The woman said:

"Where did you come from and where are you going?"

"Cape Cod," he replied; "and I am going to the Guianas."

"Isn't that South America?" she queried. "I've traveled far—on maps. Guiana," she repeated the name softly. For a moment the faint dread in her voice changed to longing. "I think I know all the beautiful names of places on the earth," she continued: "Tarragona and Seriphos and Cambodia."

"Some of them you have seen?"

"None," she answered simply. "I was born here, in the house you know, and I have never been fifty miles away."

This, he told himself, was incredible. The mystery that surrounded her deepened, stirring more strongly his impersonal curiosity.

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"You are surprised," she added; "it's mad, but true. There—there is a reason." She stopped abruptly, and, neglecting her fishing rod, sat with her hands clasped about slim knees. She gazed at him slowly, and he was impressed once more by the remarkable quality of her eyes, grey-green like olive leaves and strangely young. The momentary interest created in her by romantic and far names faded, gave place to the familiar trace of fear. In the long past he would have responded immediately to the appeal of her pale, magnetic countenance. . . . He had broken all connection with society, with——

There was a sudden, impressive jerk at his line, the rod instantly assumed the shape of a bent bow, and, as he rose, the reel spindle was lost in a grey blur and the line streaked out through the dipping tip. His companion hung breathless at his shoulder.

"He'll take all your line," she lamented as the fish continued his straight, outward course, while Woolfolk kept an even pressure on the rod.

"A hundred yards," he announced as he felt a threaded mark wheel from under his thumb. Then: "A hundred and fifty. I'm afraid it's a shark." As he spoke the fish leaped clear of the water, a spot of molten silver, and fell back in a sparkling blue spray. "It's a rock," he added. He stopped the run momentarily; the rod bent per-

ilously double, but the fish halted. Woolfolk reeled in smoothly, but another rush followed, as strong as the first. A long, equal struggle ensued, the thin line was drawn as rigid as metal, the rod quivered and arched. Once the rockfish was close enough to be clearly distinguishable—strongly built, heavy-shouldered, with black stripes drawn from gills to tail. But he was off again with a short, blundering rush.

"If you will hold the rod," Woolfolk directed his companion, "I'll gaff him." She took the rod while he bent over the wharf's side. The fish, on the surface of the water, half turned; and, striking the gaff through a gill, Woolfolk swung him up on the boarding.

"There," he pronounced, "are several dinners. I'll carry him to your kitchen."

"Nicholas would do it, but he's away," she told him; "and my father is not strong enough. That's a leviathan."

John Woolfolk placed a handle through the rockfish's gills, and, carrying it with an obvious effort, he followed her over a narrow, trampled path through the rasped palmettos. They approached the dwelling from behind the orange grove; and, coming suddenly to the porch, surprised an incredibly thin, grey man in the act of lighting a small stone pipe with a reed stem. He was sitting, but, seeing Woolfolk, he started sharply to his feet, and the pipe fell, shattering the bowl.

"My father," the woman pronounced: "Lichfield Stope."

"Millie," he stuttered painfully, "you know—I —strangers—"

John Woolfolk thought, as he presented himself, that he had never before seen such an immaterial living figure. Lichfield Stope was like the shadow of a man draped with unsubstantial, dusty linen. Into his waxen face beat a pale infusion of blood, as if a diluted wine had been poured into a semi-opaque goblet; his sunken lips puffed out and collapsed; his fingers, dust-colored like his garb, opened and shut with a rapid, mechanical rigidity.

"Father," Millie Stope remonstrated, "you must manage yourself better. You know I wouldn't bring any one to the house who would hurt us. And see—we are fetching you a splendid rockfish."

The older man made a convulsive effort to regain his composure.

"Ah, yes," he muttered; "just so."

The flush receded from his indeterminate countenance. Woolfolk saw that he had a goatee laid like a wasted yellow finger on his chin, and that his hands hung on wrists like twisted copper wires from circular cuffs fastened with large mosaic buttons.

"We are alone here," he proceeded in a fluctuating voice, the voice of a shadow; "the man is away. My daughter—I——" He grew inaud-

ible, although his lips maintained a faint movement.

The fear that lurked illusively in the daughter was in the parent magnified to an appalling panic, an instinctive, acute agony that had crushed everything but a thin, tormented spark of life. He passed his hand over a brow as dry as the spongy limbs of the cypress, brushing a scant lock like dead, bleached moss.

"The fish," he pronounced; "yes . . . acceptable."

"If you will carry it back for me," Millie Stope requested; "we have no ice; I must put it in water." He followed her about a bay window with ornamental fretting that bore the shreds of old, variegated paint. He could see, amid an incongruous wreckage within, a dismantled billiard table, its torn cloth faintly green beneath a film of dust. They turned and arrived at the kitchen door. "There, please." She indicated a bench on the outside wall, and he deposited his burden.

"You have been very nice," she told him, making her phrase less commonplace by a glance of her wide, appealing eyes. "Now, I suppose, you will go on across the world?"

"Not tonight," he replied distantly.

"Perhaps, then, you will come ashore again. We see so few people. My father would be benefited. It was only at first, so suddenly—he was startled."

"There is a great deal to do on the ketch," he replied indirectly, maintaining his retreat from the slightest advance of life. "I came ashore to discover if you had a large water supply and if I might fill my casks."

"Rain water," she informed him; "the cistern is full."

"Then I'll send Halvard to you." He withdrew a step, but paused at the incivility of his leaving.

A sudden weariness had settled over the shoulders of Millie Stope; she appeared young and very white. Woolfolk was acutely conscious of her utter isolation with the shivering figure on the porch, the unmaterialized Nicholas. She had delicate hands.

"Good-by," he said, bowing formally. "And thank you for the fishing."

He whistled sharply for the tender.

King Vidor's "Wild Oranges." *A Goldwyn Picture.*

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.

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IV

THROUGHOUT the afternoon, with a triangular scraping iron, he assisted Halvard in removing the whitened varnish from the yacht's mahogany. They worked silently, with only the shrill note of the edges drawing across the wood, while the westering sun plunged its diagonal rays far into the transparent depths of the bay. The *Gar* floated motionless on water like a pale evening over purple and silver flowers threaded by fish painted the vermilion and green of parrakeets. Inshore the pallid cypresses seemed, as John Woolfolk watched them, to twist in febrile pain. With the waning of day the land took on its air of unhealthy mystery; the mingled, heavy scents floated out in a sickly tide; the ruined façade glimmered in the half light.

Woolfolk's thoughts turned back to the woman living in the miasma of perfume and secret fear. He heard again her wistful voice pronounce the names of far places, of Tarragona and Seriphos, investing them with the accent of an intense hopeless desire. He thought of the inexplicable place of her birth and of the riven, unsubstantial figure of the man with the blood pulsing into his ocherous face.

Some old, profound error or calamity had laid its blight upon him, he was certain; but the most lamentable inheritance was not sufficient to account for the acute apprehension in his daughter's tones. This was different in kind from the spiritual collapse of the aging man. It was actual, he realized that; proceeding—in part at least—from without.

He wondered, scraping with difficulty the underturning of a cathead, if whatever dark tide was centered above her would, perhaps, descend through the oleander-scented night and stifle her in the stagnant dwelling. He had a swift, vividly complete vision of the old man face down upon the floor in a flickering, reddish light.

He smiled in self-contempt at this neurotic fancy; and, straightening his cramped muscles, rolled a cigarette. It might be that the years he had spent virtually alone on the silence of various waters had affected his brain. Halvard's broad, concentrated countenance, the steady, grave gaze and determined mouth, cleared Woolfolk's mind of its phantoms. He moved to the cockpit and from there said:

"That will do for today."

Halvard followed, and commenced once more the familiar, ordered preparations for supper. John Woolfolk, smoking while the sky turned to malachite, became sharply aware of the unthinkable monotony of the universal course, of the centuries wheeling in dull succession into infinity. Life seemed to him no more varied than the wire

drum in which squirrels raced nowhere. His own lot, he told himself grimly, was no worse than another. Existence was all of the same drab piece. It had seemed gay enough when he was young, worked with gold and crimson threads, and then——

His thoughts were broken by Halvard's appearance in the companionway, and he descended to his solitary supper in the contracted, still cabin.

Again on deck his sense of the monotony of life trebled. He had been cruising now about the edges of continents for twelve years. For twelve years he had taken no part in the existence of the cities he had passed, as often as possible without stopping, and of the villages gathered invitingly under their canopies of trees. He was—yes, he must be—forty-six. Life was passing away; well, let it . . . worthless.

The growing radiance of the moon glimmered across the water and folded the land in a gossamer veil. The same uneasiness, the inchoate desire to go ashore that had seized upon him the night before, reasserted its influence. The face of Millie Stope floated about him like a magical gardenia in the night of the matted trees. He resisted the pressure longer than before; but in the end he was seated in the tender, pulling toward the beach.

He entered the orange grove and slowly approached the house beyond. Millie Stope advanced with a quick welcome.

"I'm glad," she said simply. "Nicholas is back. The fish weighed—"

"I think I'd better not know," he interrupted. "I might be tempted to mention it in the future, when it would take on the historic suspicion of the fish story."

"But it was imposing," she protested. "Let's go to the sea; it's so limitless in the moonlight."

He followed her over the path to where the remains of the wharf projected into a sea as black, and as solid apparently, as ebony, and across which the moon flung a narrow way like a chalk mark. Millie Stope seated herself on the boarding and he found a place near by. She leaned forward, with her arms propped up and her chin couched on her palms. Her potency increased rather than diminished with association; her skin had a rare texture; her movements, the turn of the wrists, were distinguished. He wondered again at the strangeness of her situation.

She looked about suddenly and surprised his palpable questioning.

"You are puzzled," she pronounced. "Perhaps you are setting me in the middle of romance. Please don't! Nothing you might guess——" She broke off abruptly, returned to her former pose. "And yet," she added presently, "I have a perverse desire to talk about myself. It's perverse because, although you are a little curious, you have no real interest in what I might say. There is something

about you like—yes, like the cast-iron dog that used to stand in our lawn. It rusted away, cold to the last and indifferent, although I talked to it by the hour. But I did get a little comfort from its stolid painted eye. Perhaps you'd act in the same way.

"And then," she went on when Woolfolk had somberly failed to comment, "you are going away, you will forget, it can't possibly matter. I must talk, now that I have urged myself this far. After all, you needn't have come back. But where shall I begin? You should know something of the very first. That happened in Virginia. . . . My father didn't go to war," she said, sudden and clear. She turned her face toward him, and he saw that it had lost its flower-like quality; it looked as if it had been carved in stone.

"He lived in a small, intensely loyal town," she continued; "and when Virginia seceded it burned with a single high flame of sacrifice. My father had been always a diffident man; he collected mezzotints and avoided people. So, when the enlistment began, he shrank away from the crowds and hot speeches, and the men went off without him. He lived in complete retirement then, with his prints, in a town of women. It wasn't impossible at first; he discussed the situation with the few old tradesmen that remained, and exchanged bows with the wives and daughters of his friends. But when the dead commenced to be brought in from the front

it got worse. Belle Semple—he had always thought her unusually nice and pretty—mocked at him on the street. Then one morning he found an apron tied to the knob of the front door.

"After that he went out only at night. His servants had deserted him, and he lived by himself in a biggish, solemn house. Sometimes the news of losses and deaths would be shouted through his windows; once stones were thrown in, but mostly he was let alone. It must have been frightful in his empty rooms when the South went from bad to worse." She paused, and John Woolfolk could see, even in the obscurity, the slow shudder that passed over her.

"When the war was over and what men were left returned—one with hands gone at the wrists, another without legs in a shabby wheelchair—the life of the town started once more, but my father was for ever outside of it. Little subscriptions for burials were made up, small schemes for getting the necessities, but he was never asked. Men spoke to him again, even some of the women. That was all.

"I think it was then that a curious, perpetual dread fastened on his mind—a fear of the wind in the night, of breaking twigs or sudden voices. He ordered things to be left on the steps, and he would peer out from under the blind to make sure that the walk was empty before he opened the door.

"You must realize," she said in a sharper voice,

"that my father was not a pure coward at first. He was an extremely sensitive man who hated the rude stir of living and who simply asked to be left undisturbed with his portfolios. But life's not like that. The war hunted him out and ruined him; it destroyed his being, just as it destroyed the fortunes of others.

"Then he began to think—it was absolute fancy—that there was a conspiracy in the town to kill him. He sent some of his things away, got together what money he had, and one night left his home secretly on foot. He tramped south for weeks, living for a while in small place after place, until he reached Georgia, and then a town about fifty miles from here——"

She broke off, sitting rigidly erect, looking out over the level black sea with its shifting, chalky line of light, and a long silence followed. The antiphonal crying of the owls sounded over the bubbling swamp, the mephitic perfume hung like a vapor on the shore. John Woolfolk shifted his position.

"My mother told me this," his companion said suddenly. "Father repeated it over and over through the nights after they were married. He slept only in snatches, and would wake with a gasp and his heart almost bursting. I know almost nothing about her, except that she had a brave heart—or she would have gone mad. She was English and had been a governess. They met in the little

hotel where they were married. Then father bought this place, and they came here to live."

Woolfolk had a vision of the tenuous figure of Lichfield Stope; he was surprised that such acute agony had left the slightest trace of humanity; yet the other, after forty years of torment, still survived to shudder at a chance footfall, the advent of a casual and harmless stranger.

This, then, was by implication the history of the woman at his side; it disposed of the mystery that had veiled her situation here. It was surprisingly clear, even to the subtle influence that, inherited from her father, had set the shadow of his own obsession upon her voice and eyes. Yet, in the moment that she had been made explicable, he recalled the conviction that the knowledge of an actual menace lurked in her mind; he had seen it in the tension of her body, in the anxiety of fleet backward glances.

The latter, he told himself, might be merely a symptom of mental sickness, a condition natural to the influences under which she had been formed. He tested and rejected that possibility—there could be no doubt of her absolute sanity. It was patent in a hundred details of her carriage, in her mentality as it had been revealed in her restrained, balanced narrative.

There was, too, the element of her mother to be considered. Millie Stope had known very little about her, principally the self-evident fact of the

latter's "bravè heart." It would have needed that to remain steadfast through the racking recitals of the long, waking darks; to accompany to this desolate and lonely refuge the man who had had an apron tied to his doorknob. In the degree that the daughter had been a prey to the man's fear she would have benefited from the stiffer qualities of the English governess. Life once more assumed its enigmatic mask.

His companion said:

"All that—and I haven't said a word about myself, the real end of my soliloquy. I'm permanently discouraged; I have qualms about boring you. No, I shall never find another listener as satisfactory as the iron dog."

A light glimmered far at sea. "I sit here a great deal," she informed him, " and watch the ships, a thumbprint of blue smoke at day and a spark at night, going up and down their water roads. You are enviable—getting up your anchor, sailing where you like, safe and free." Her voice took on a passionate intensity that surprised him; it was sick with weariness and longing, with sudden revolt from the pervasive apprehension.

"Safe and free," he repeated thinly, as if satirizing the condition implied by those commonplace, assuaging words. He had, in his flight from society, sought simply peace. John Woolfolk now questioned all his implied success. He had found the elemental hush of the sea, the iron aloofness of

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A long, hollow wail rose from the land, and Millie Stope moved sharply.

"There's Nicholas," she exclaimed, "blowing on the conch! They don't know where I am; I'd better go in."

A small, evident panic took possession of her; the shiver in her voice swelled.

"No, don't come," she added. "I'll be quicker without you." She made her way over the wharf to the shore, but there paused. "I suppose you'll be going soon?"

"Tomorrow probably," he answered.

On the ketch Halvard had gone below for the night. The yacht swayed slightly to an unseen swell; the riding light moved backward and forward, its ray flickering over the glassy water. John Woolfolk brought his bedding from the cabin and, disposing it on deck, lay with his wakeful dark face set against the far, multitudinous worlds.

V

IN the morning Halvard proposed a repainting of the engine.

"The Florida air," he said, "eats metal overnight." And the ketch remained anchored.

Later in the day Woolfolk sounded the water casks cradled in the cockpit, and, when they answered hollow, directed his man with regard to their refilling. They drained a cask. Halvard put it on the tender and pulled in to the beach. There he shouldered the empty container and disappeared among the trees.

Woolfolk was forward, preparing a chain hawser for coral anchorages, when he saw Halvard tramping shortly back over the sand. He entered the tender and, with a vicious shove, rowed with a powerful, vindictive sweep toward the ketch. The cask evidently had been left behind. He made the tender fast and swung aboard with his notable agility.

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bornly proceeded. "I'll turn any knife out of his hand." It was evident that he was laboring under an intense growing excitement and anger.

"The only idiot's not on land," Woolfolk told him. "Where's the water cask you took ashore?"

"Broken."

"How?"

"I'll tell you fast enough. There was nobody about when I went up to the house, although there was a chair rocking on the porch as if a person had just left. I knocked at the door; it was open, and I was certain that I heard someone inside, but nobody answered. Then after a bit I went around back. The kitchen was open, too, and no one in sight. I saw the water cistern and thought I'd fill up, when you could say something afterward. I did, and was rolling the cask about the house when this—loggerhead came out of the bushes. He wanted to know what I was getting away with, and I explained, but it didn't suit him. He said I might be telling facts and again I mightn't. I saw there was no use talking, and started rolling the cask again; but he put his foot on it, and I pushed one way and he the other——"

"And between you, you stove in the cask," Woolfolk interrupted.

"That's it," Poul Halvard answered concisely. "Then I got mad, and offered to beat in his face, but he had a knife. I could have broken it out of his grip—I've done it before in a place or two—

but I thought I'd better come aboard and report before anything general began."

John Woolfolk was momentarily at a loss to establish the identity of Halvard's assailant.

He soon realized, however, that it must be Nicholas, whom he had never seen, and who had blown such an imperative summons on the conch the night before. Halvard's temper was communicated to him; he moved abruptly to where the tender was fastened.

"Put me ashore," he directed. He would make it clear that his man was not to be interrupted in the execution of his orders, and that his property could not be arbitrarily destroyed.

When the tender ran upon the beach and had been secured, Halvard started to follow him, but Woolfolk waved him back. There was a stir on the portico as he approached, the flitting of an unsubstantial form; but, hastening, John Woolfolk arrested Lichfield Stope in the doorway.

"Morning," he nodded abruptly. "I came to speak to you about a water cask of mine."

The other swayed like a thin, grey column of smoke.

"Ah, yes," he pronounced with difficulty. "Water cask——"

"It was broken here a little while back."

At the suggestion of violence such a pitiable panic fell upon the older man that Woolfolk halted. Lichfield Stope raised his hands as if to ward off

hotel where they were married. Then father bought this place, and they came here to live."

Woolfolk had a vision of the tenuous figure of Lichfield Stope; he was surprised that such acute agony had left the slightest trace of humanity; yet the other, after forty years of torment, still survived to shudder at a chance footfall, the advent of a casual and harmless stranger.

This, then, was by implication the history of the woman at his side; it disposed of the mystery that had veiled her situation here. It was surprisingly clear, even to the subtle influence that, inherited from her father, had set the shadow of his own obsession upon her voice and eyes. Yet, in the moment that she had been made explicable, he recalled the conviction that the knowledge of an actual menace lurked in her mind; he had seen it in the tension of her body, in the anxiety of fleet backward glances.

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His companion said:

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Woolfolk had a vision of the tenuous figure of Lichfield Stope; he was surprised that such acute agony had left the slightest trace of humanity; yet the other, after forty years of torment, still survived to shudder at a chance footfall, the advent of a casual and harmless stranger.

This, then, was by implication the history of the woman at his side; it disposed of the mystery that had veiled her situation here. It was surprisingly clear, even to the subtle influence that, inherited from her father, had set the shadow of his own obsession upon her voice and eyes. Yet, in the moment that she had been made explicable, he recalled the conviction that the knowledge of an actual menace lurked in her mind; he had seen it in the tension of her body, in the anxiety of fleet backward glances.

The latter, he told himself, might be merely a symptom of mental sickness, a condition natural to the influences under which she had been formed. He tested and rejected that possibility—there could be no doubt of her absolute sanity. It was patent in a hundred details of her carriage, in her mentality as it had been revealed in her restrained, balanced narrative.

There was, too, the element of her mother to be considered. Millie Stope had known very little about her, principally the self-evident fact of the

latter's "bravè heart." It would have needed that to remain steadfast through the racking recitals of the long, waking darks; to accompany to this desolate and lonely refuge the man who had had an apron tied to his doorknob. In the degree that the daughter had been a prey to the man's fear she would have benefited from the stiffer qualities of the English governess. Life once more assumed its enigmatic mask.

His companion said:

"All that—and I haven't said a word about myself, the real end of my soliloquy. I'm permanently discouraged; I have qualms about boring you. No, I shall never find another listener as satisfactory as the iron dog."

A light glimmered far at sea. "I sit here a great deal," she informed him, " and watch the ships, a thumbprint of blue smoke at day and a spark at night, going up and down their water roads. You are enviable—getting up your anchor, sailing where you like, safe and free." Her voice took on a passionate intensity that surprised him; it was sick with weariness and longing, with sudden revolt from the pervasive apprehension.

"Safe and free," he repeated thinly, as if satirizing the condition implied by those commonplace, assuaging words. He had, in his flight from society, sought simply peace. John Woolfolk now questioned all his implied success. He had found the elemental hush of the sea, the iron aloofness of

rocky and uninhabited coasts, but he had never been able to still the dull rebellion within, the legacy of the past. A feeling of complete failure settled over him. His safety and freedom amounted to this—that life had broken him and cast him aside.

A long, hollow wail rose from the land, and Millie Stope moved sharply.

"There's Nicholas," she exclaimed, "blowing on the conch! They don't know where I am; I'd better go in."

A small, evident panic took possession of her; the shiver in her voice swelled.

"No, don't come," she added. "I'll be quicker without you." She made her way over the wharf to the shore, but there paused. "I suppose you'll be going soon?"

"Tomorrow probably," he answered.

On the ketch Halvard had gone below for the night. The yacht swayed slightly to an unseen swell; the riding light moved backward and forward, its ray flickering over the glassy water. John Woolfolk brought his bedding from the cabin and, disposing it on deck, lay with his wakeful dark face set against the far, multitudinous worlds.

V

IN the morning Halvard proposed a repainting of the engine.

"The Florida air," he said, "eats metal overnight." And the ketch remained anchored.

Later in the day Woolfolk sounded the water casks cradled in the cockpit, and, when they answered hollow, directed his man with regard to their refilling. They drained a cask. Halvard put it on the tender and pulled in to the beach. There he shouldered the empty container and disappeared among the trees.

Woolfolk was forward, preparing a chain hawser for coral anchorages, when he saw Halvard tramping shortly back over the sand. He entered the tender and, with a vicious shove, rowed with a powerful, vindictive sweep toward the ketch. The cask evidently had been left behind. He made the tender fast and swung aboard with his notable agility.

"There's a damn idiot in that house," he declared, in a surprising departure from his customary detached manner.

"Explain yourself," Woolfolk demanded shortly.

"But I'm going back after him," the sailor stub-

bornly proceeded. "I'll turn any knife out of his hand." It was evident that he was laboring under an intense growing excitement and anger.

"The only idiot's not on land," Woolfolk told him. "Where's the water cask you took ashore?"

"Broken."

"How?"

"I'll tell you fast enough. There was nobody about when I went up to the house, although there was a chair rocking on the porch as if a person had just left. I knocked at the door; it was open, and I was certain that I heard someone inside, but nobody answered. Then after a bit I went around back. The kitchen was open, too, and no one in sight. I saw the water cistern and thought I'd fill up, when you could say something afterward. I did, and was rolling the cask about the house when this—loggerhead came out of the bushes. He wanted to know what I was getting away with, and I explained, but it didn't suit him. He said I might be telling facts and again I mightn't. I saw there was no use talking, and started rolling the cask again; but he put his foot on it, and I pushed one way and he the other——"

"And between you, you stove in the cask," Woolfolk interrupted.

"That's it," Poul Halvard answered concisely. "Then I got mad, and offered to beat in his face, but he had a knife. I could have broken it out of his grip—I've done it before in a place or two—

but I thought I'd better come aboard and report before anything general began."

John Woolfolk was momentarily at a loss to establish the identity of Halvard's assailant.

He soon realized, however, that it must be Nicholas, whom he had never seen, and who had blown such an imperative summons on the conch the night before. Halvard's temper was communicated to him; he moved abruptly to where the tender was fastened.

"Put me ashore," he directed. He would make it clear that his man was not to be interrupted in the execution of his orders, and that his property could not be arbitrarily destroyed.

When the tender ran upon the beach and had been secured, Halvard started to follow him, but Woolfolk waved him back. There was a stir on the portico as he approached, the flitting of an unsubstantial form; but, hastening, John Woolfolk arrested Lichfield Stope in the doorway.

"Morning," he nodded abruptly. "I came to speak to you about a water cask of mine."

The other swayed like a thin, grey column of smoke.

"Ah, yes," he pronounced with difficulty. "Water cask——"

"It was broken here a little while back."

At the suggestion of violence such a pitiable panic fell upon the older man that Woolfolk halted. Lichfield Stope raised his hands as if to ward off

the mere impact of the words themselves; his face was stained with the thin red tide of congestion.

"You have a man named Nicholas," Woolfolk proceeded. "I should like to see him."

The other made a gesture as tremulous and indeterminate as his speech and appeared to dissolve into the hall. John Woolfolk stood for a moment undecided and then moved about the house toward the kitchen. There, he thought, he might obtain an explanation of the breaking of the cask. A man was walking about within and came to the door as Woolfolk approached.

The latter told himself that he had never seen a blanker countenance. In profile it showed a narrow brow, a huge, drooping nose, a pinched mouth and insignificant chin. From the front the face of the man in the doorway held the round, unscored cheeks of a fat and sleepy boy. The eyes were mere long glimmers of vision in thick folds of flesh; the mouth, upturned at the corners, lent a fixed, mechanical smile to the whole. It was a countenance on which the passage of time and thoughts had left no mark; its stolidity had been moved by no feeling. His body was heavy and sagging. It possessed, Woolfolk recognized, a considerable unwieldy strength, and was completely covered by a variously spotted and streaked apron.

"Are you Nicholas?" John Woolfolk demanded.

The other nodded.

"Then, I take it, you are the man who broke my water cask."

"It was full of our water," Nicholas replied in a thick voice.

"That," said Woolfolk, "I am not going to argue with you. I came ashore to instruct you to let my man and my property alone."

"Then leave our water be."

John Woolfolk's temper, the instinctive arrogance of men living apart from the necessary submissions of communal life, in positions—however small—of supreme command, flared through his body.

"I told you," he repeated shortly, "that I would not discuss the question of the water. I have no intention of justifying myself to you. Remember—your hands off."

The other said surprisingly: "Don't get me started!" A spasm of emotion made a faint, passing shade on his sodden countenance; his voice held almost a note of appeal.

"Whether you 'start' or not is without the slightest significance," Woolfolk coldly responded.

"Mind," the man went on, "I spoke first."

A steady twitching commenced in a muscle at the flange of his nose. Woolfolk was aware of an increasing tension in the other, that gained a peculiar oppressiveness from the lack of any corresponding outward expression. His heavy, blunt

hand fumbled under the maculate apron; his chest heaved with a sudden, tempestuous breathing. "Don't start me," he repeated in a voice so blurred that the words were hardly recognizable. He swallowed convulsively, his emotion mounting to an inchoate passion, when suddenly a change was evident. He made a short, violent effort to regain his self-control, his gaze fastened on a point behind Woolfolk.

The latter turned and saw Millie Stope approaching, her countenance haggard with fear. "What has happened?" she cried breathlessly while yet a little distance away. "Tell me at once——"

"Nothing," Woolfolk promptly replied, appalled by the agony in her voice. "Nicholas and I had a small misunderstanding. A triviality," he added, thinking of the other's hand groping beneath the apron.

A Goldwyn Picture.

King Vidor's "Wild Oranges." A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.

VI

ON the morning following the breaking of his water cask John Woolfolk saw the slender figure of Millie on the beach. She waved and called, her voice coming thin and clear across the water:

"Are visitors—encouraged?"

He sent Halvard in with the tender, and as they approached, dropped a gangway over the *Gar's* side. She stepped lightly down into the cockpit with a naïve expression of surprise at the yacht's immaculate order. The sails lay precisely housed, the stays, freshly tarred, glistened in the sun, the brasswork and newly varnished mahogany shone, the mathematically coiled ropes rested on a deck as spotless as wood could be scraped.

"Why," she exclaimed, "it couldn't be neater if you were two nice old ladies!"

"I warn you," Woolfolk replied, "Halvard will not regard that particularly as a compliment. He will assure you that the order of a proper yacht is beyond the most ambitious dream of a mere housekeeper."

She laughed as Halvard placed a chair for her. She was, Woolfolk thought, lighter in spirit on the

ketch than she had been on shore; there was the faintest imaginable stain on her petal-like cheeks; her eyes, like olive leaves, were almost gay. She sat with her slender knees crossed, her fine arms held with hands clasped behind her head, and clad in a crisply ironed, crude white dress, into the band of which she had thrust a spray of orange blossoms.

John Woolfolk was increasingly conscious of her peculiar charm. Millie Stope, he suddenly realized, was like the wild oranges in the neglected grove at her door. A man brought in contact with her magnetic being charged with appealing and mysterious emotions, in a setting of exotic night and black sea, would find other women, the ordinary concourse of society, insipid—like faintly sweetened water.

She was entirely at home on the ketch, sitting against the immaculate rim of deck and the sea. He resented that familiarity as an unwarranted intrusion of the world he had left. Other people, women among them, had unavoidably crossed his deck, but they had been patently alien, momentary; but Millie, with her still delight at the yacht's compact comfort, her intuitive comprehension of its various details—the lamps set in gimbals, the china racks and chart cases slung overhead—entered at once into the spirit of the craft that was John Woolfolk's sole place of being.

He was now disturbed by the ease with which she had established herself both in the yacht and in

his imagination. He had thought, after so many years, to have destroyed all the bonds which ordinarily connect men with life; but now a mere curiosity had grown into a tangible interest, and the interest showed unmistakable signs of becoming sympathy.

She smiled at him from her position by the wheel; and he instinctively responded with such an unaccustomed, ready warmth that he said abruptly, seeking refuge in occupation:

"Why not reach out to sea? The conditions are perfect."

"Ah, please!" she cried. "Just to take up the anchor would thrill me for months."

A light west wind was blowing; and deliberate, exactly spaced swells, their tops laced with iridescent spray, were sweeping in from a sea like a glassy blue pavement. Woolfolk issued a short order, and the sailor moved forward with his customary smooth swiftness. The sails were shaken loose, the mainsail slowly spread its dazzling expanse to the sun, the jib and jigger were trimmed, and the anchor came up with a short rush.

Millie rose with her arms outspread, her chin high and eyes closed.

"Free!" she proclaimed with a slow, deep breath.

The sails filled and the ketch forged ahead. John Woolfolk, at the wheel, glanced at the chart section beside him.

"There's four feet on the bar at low water," he

told Halvard. "The tide's at half flood now."

The *Gar* increased her speed, slipping easily out of the bay, gladly, it seemed to Woolfolk, turning toward the sea. The bow rose, and the ketch dipped forward over a spent wave. Millie Stope grasped the wheelbox. "Free!" she said again with shining eyes.

The yacht rose more sharply, hung on a wave's crest and slid lightly downward. Woolfolk, with a sinewy, dark hand directing their course, was intent upon the swelling sails. Once he stopped, tightening a halyard, and the sailor said:

"The main peak won't flatten, sir."

The swells grew larger. The *Gar* climbed their smooth heights and coasted like a feather beyond. Directly before the yacht they were unbroken, but on either side they foamed into a silver quickly reabsorbed in the deeper water within the bar.

Woolfolk turned from his scrutiny of the ketch to his companion, and was surprised to see her, with all the joy evaporated from her countenance, clinging rigidly to the rail. He said to himself, "Seasick." Then he realized that it was not a physical illness that possessed her, but a profound, increasing terror. She endeavored to smile back at his questioning gaze, and said in a small, uncertain voice:

"It's so—so big!"

For a moment he saw in her a clear resemblance to the shrinking figure of Lichfield Stope. It was as though suddenly she had lost her fine profile

and become indeterminate, shadowy. The grey web of the old deflection in Virginia extended over her out of the past—of the past that, Woolfolk thought, would not die.

The *Gar* rose higher still, dropped into the deep, watery valley, and the woman's face was drawn and wet, the back of her straining hand was dead white. Without further delay John Woolfolk put the wheel sharply over and told his man, "We're going about." Halvard busied himself with the shaking sails.

"Really—I'd rather you didn't," Millie gasped. "I must learn . . . no longer a child."

But Woolfolk held the ketch on her return course; his companion's panic was growing beyond her control. They passed once more between the broken waves and entered the still bay with its border of flowering earth. There, when the yacht had been anchored, Millie sat gazing silently at the open sea whose bigness had so unexpectedly distressed her. Her face was pinched, her mouth set in a straight, hard line. That, somehow, suggested to Woolfolk the enigmatic governess; it was in contradiction to the rest.

"How strange," she said at last in an insuperably weary voice, "to be forced back to this place that I loathe, by myself, by my own cowardice. It's exactly as if my spirit were chained—then the body could never be free. What is it," she demanded of John Woolfolk, "that lives in our own hearts and betrays our utmost convictions and ef-

forts, and destroys us against all knowledge and desire?"

"It may be called heredity," he replied; "that is its simplest phase. The others extend into the realms of the fantastic."

"It's unjust," she cried bitterly, "to be condemned to die in a pit with all one's instinct in the sky!"

The old plea of injustice quivered for a moment over the water and then died away. John Woolfolk had made the same passionate protest, he had cried it with clenched hands at the withdrawn stars, and the profound inattention of Nature had appalled his agony. A thrill of pity moved him for the suffering woman beside him. Her mouth was still unrelaxed. There was in her the material for a struggle against the invidious past.

In her slender frame the rebellion took on an accent of the heroic. Woolfolk recalled how utterly he had gone down before mischance. But his case had been extreme, he had suffered an unendurable wrong at the hand of Fate. Halvard diverted his thoughts by placing before them a tray of sugared pineapple and symmetrical cakes. Millie, too, lost her tension; she showed a feminine pleasure at the yacht's fine napkins, approved the polish of the glass.

"It's all quite wonderful," she said.

"I have nothing else to care for," Woolfolk told her.

"No place nor people on land?"

"None."

"And you are satisfied?"

"Absolutely," he replied with an unnecessary emphasis. He was, he told himself aggressively; he wanted nothing more from living and had nothing to give. Yet his pity for Millie Stope mounted obscurely, bringing with it thoughts, dim obligations and desires, to which he had declared himself dead.

"I wonder if you are to be envied?" she queried.

A sudden astounding willingness to speak of himself, even of the past, swept over him.

"Hardly," he replied. "All the things that men value were killed for me in an instant, in the flutter of a white skirt."

"Can you talk about it?"

"There's almost nothing to tell; it was so unrelated, so senseless and blind. It can't be dressed into a story, it has no moral—no meaning. Well—it was twelve years ago. I had just been married, and we had gone to a property in the country. After two days I had to go into town, and when I came back Ellen met me in a breaking cart. It was a flag station, buried in maples, with a white road winding back to where we were staying.

"Ellen had trouble in holding the horse when the train left, and the beast shied going from the station. It was Monday, clothes hung from a line in a side yard and a skirt fluttered in a little breeze. The horse reared, the strapped back of the seat

broke, and Ellen was thrown—on her head. It killed her."

He fell silent. Millie breathed sharply, and a ripple struck with a faint slap on the yacht's side. Then: "One can't allow that," he continued in a lower voice, as if arguing with himself; "arbitrary, wanton; impossible to accept such conditions——

"She was young," he once more took up the narrative; "a girl in a tennis skirt with a gay scarf about her waist—quite dead in a second. The clothes still fluttered on the line. You see," he ended, "nothing instructive, tragic—only a crude dissonance."

"Then you left everything?"

He failed to answer, and she gazed with a new understanding and interest over the *Gar*. Her attention was attracted to the beach, and, following her gaze, John Woolfolk saw the bulky figure of Nicholas gazing at them from under his palm. A palpable change, a swift shadow, enveloped Millie Stope.

"I must go back," she said uneasily; "there will be dinner, and my father has been alone all morning."

But Woolfolk was certain that, however convincing the reasons she put forward, it was none of these that was taking her so hurriedly ashore. The dread that for the past few hours had almost vanished from her tones, her gaze, had returned

multiplied. It was, he realized, the objective fear; her entire being was shrinking as if in anticipation of an imminent calamity, a physical blow.

Woolfolk himself put her on the beach; and, with the tender canted on the sand, steadied her spring. As her hand rested on his arm it gripped him with a sharp force; a response pulsed through his body; and an involuntary color rose in her pale, fine cheeks.

Nicholas, stolidly set with his shoes half buried in the sand, surveyed them without a shade of feeling on his thick countenance. But Woolfolk saw that the other's fingers were crawling toward his pocket. He realized that the man's dully smiling mask concealed sultry, ungoverned emotions, blind springs of hate.

VII

AGAIN on the ketch the inevitable reaction overtook him. He had spoken of Ellen's death to no one until now, through all the years when he had been a wanderer on the edge of his world, and he bitterly regretted his reference to it. In speaking he had betrayed his resolution of solitude. Life, against all his instinct, his wishes, had reached out and caught him, however lightly, in its tentacles.

The least surrender, he realized, the slightest opening of his interest, would bind him with a multitude of attachments; the octopus that he dreaded, uncoiling arm after arm, would soon hold him again, a helpless victim for the fury Chance.

He had made a disastrous error in following his curiosity, the insistent scent of the wild oranges, to the house where Millie had advanced on the dim portico. His return there had been the inevitable result of the first mistake, and the rest had followed with a fatal ease. Whatever had been the deficiences of the past twelve years he had been free from new complications, fresh treacheries. Now, with hardly a struggle, he was falling back into the old trap.

The wind died away absolutely, and a haze gathered delicately over the sea, thickening through the afternoon, and turned rosy by the declining sun. The shore had faded from sight.

A sudden energy leaped through John Woolfolk and rang out in an abrupt summons to Halvard. "Get up anchor," he commanded.

Poul Halvard, at the mainstay, remarked tentatively: "There's not a capful of wind."

The wide calm, Woolfolk thought, was but a part of a general conspiracy against his liberty, his memories. "Get the anchor up," he repeated harshly. "We'll go under the engine." The sudden jarring of the *Gar's* engine sounded muffled in a shut space like the flushed heart of a shell. The yacht moved forward, with a wake like folded gauze, into a shimmer of formless and pure color.

John Woolfolk sat at the wheel, motionless except for an occasional scant shifting of his hands. He was sailing by compass; the patent log, trailing behind on its long cord, maintained a constant, jerking register on its dial. He had resolutely banished all thought save that of navigation. Halvard was occupied forward, clearing the deck of the accumulations of the anchorage. When he came aft Woolfolk said shortly: "No mess."

The haze deepened and night fell, and the sailor lighted and placed the port and starboard lights. The binnacle lamp threw up a dim, orange radiance on Woolfolk's somber countenance. He continued

for three and four and then five hours at the wheel, while the smooth clamor of the engine, a slight quiver of the hull, alone marked their progress through an invisible element.

Once more he had left life behind. This had more the aspect of a flight than at any time previous. It was, obscurely, an unpleasant thought, and he endeavored—unsuccessfully—to put it from him. He was but pursuing the course he had laid out, following his necessary, inflexible determination.

His mind for a moment turned independently back to Millie with her double burden of fear. He had left her without a word, isolated with Nicholas, concealing with a blank smile his enigmatic being, and with her impotent parent.

Well, he was not responsible for her, he had paid for the privilege of immunity; he had but listened to her story, volunteering nothing. John Woolfolk wished, however, that he had said some final, useful word to her before going. He was certain that, looking for the ketch and unexpectedly finding the bay empty, she would suffer a pang, if only of loneliness. In the short while that he had been there she had come to depend on him for companionship, for relief from the insuperable monotony of her surroundings; for, perhaps, still more. He wondered what that more might contain. He thought of Millie at the present moment, probably lying awake, steeped in dread. His flight now assumed the as-

pect of an act of cowardice, of desertion. He rehearsed wearily the extenuations of his position, but without any palpable relief.

An even more disturbing possibility lodged in his thoughts—he was not certain that he did not wish to be actually back with Millie again. He felt the quick pressure of her fingers on his arm as she jumped from the tender; her magnetic personality hung about him like an aroma. Cloaked in mystery, pale and irresistible, she appealed to him from the edge of the wild oranges.

This, he told himself again, was but the manner in which a ruthless Nature set her lures; it was the deceptive vestment of romance. He held the ketch relentlessly on her course, with—now—all his thoughts, his inclinations, returning to Millie Stope. In a final, desperate rally of his scattering resolution he told himself that he was unfaithful to the tragic memory of Ellen. This last stay broke abruptly, and left him defenseless against the tyranny of his mounting desires. Strangely he felt the sudden pressure of a stirring wind upon his face; and, almost with an oath, he put the wheel sharply over and the *Gar* swung about.

Poul Halvard had been below, by inference asleep; but when the yacht changed her course he immediately appeared on deck. He moved aft, but Woolfolk made no explanation, the sailor put no

questions. The wind freshened, grew sustained. Woolfolk said:

"Make sail."

Soon after, the mainsail rose, a ghostly white expanse on the night. John Woolfolk trimmed the jigger, shut off the engine; and, moving through a sudden, vast hush, they retraced their course. The bay was ablaze with sunlight, the morning well advanced, when the ketch floated back to her anchorage under the oleanders.

VIII

WHETHER he returned or fled, Woolfolk thought, he was enveloped in an atmosphere of defeat. He relinquished the wheel, but remained seated, drooping at his post. The indefatigable Halvard proceeded with the efficient discharge of his narrow, exacting duties. After a short space John Woolfolk descended to the cabin, where, on an unmade berth, he fell immediately asleep.

He woke to a dim interior and twilight gathering outside. He shaved—without conscious purpose—with meticulous care, and put on the blue flannel coat. Later he rowed himself ashore and proceeded directly through the orange grove to the house beyond.

Millie Stope was seated on the portico, and laid a restraining hand on her father's arm as he rose, attempting to retreat at Woolfolk's approach. The latter, with a commonplace greeting, resumed his place.

Millie's face was dim and potent in the gloom, and Lichfield Stope more than ever resembled an uneasy ghost. He muttered an indistinct response to a period directed at him by Woolfolk and

turned with a low, urgent appeal to his daughter. The latter, with a hopeless gesture, relinquished his arm, and the other vanished.

"You were sailing this morning," Millie commented listlessly.

"I had gone," he said without explanation. Then he added: "But I came back."

A silence threatened them which he resolutely broke: "Do you remember, when you told me about your father, that you wanted really to talk about yourself? Will you do that now?"

"Tonight I haven't the courage."

"I am not idly curious," he persisted.

"Just what are you?"

"I don't know," he admitted frankly. "At the present moment I'm lost, fogged. But, meanwhile, I'd like to give you any assistance in my power. You seem, in a mysterious way, needful of help."

She turned her head sharply in the direction of the open hall and said in a high, clear voice, that yet rang strangely false: "I am quite well cared for by my father and Nicholas." She moved closer to him, dragging her chair across the uneven porch, in the rasp of which she added, quick and low:

"Don't—please."

A mounting exasperation seized him at the secrecy that veiled her, hid her from him, and he answered stiffly: "I am merely intrusive."

She was seated above him, and she leaned forward and swiftly pressed his fingers, loosely

King Vidor's "Wild Oranges." *A Goldwyn Picture.*

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.

clasped about a knee. Her hand was as cold as salt. His irritation vanished before a welling pity. He got now a sharp, recognized happiness from her nearness; his feeling for her increased with the accumulating seconds. After the surrender, the admission, of his return he had grown elemental, sensitized to emotions rather than to processes of intellect. His ardor had the poignancy of the period beyond youth. It had a trace of the consciousness of the fatal waning of life which gave it a depth denied to younger passions. He wished to take Millie Stope at once from all memory of the troublous past, to have her alone in a totally different and thrilling existence.

It was a personal and blind desire, born in the unaccustomed tumult of his newly released feelings.

They sat for a long while, silent or speaking in trivialities, when he proposed a walk to the sea; but she declined in that curiously loud and false tone. It seemed to Woolfolk that, for the moment, she had addressed someone not immediately present; and involuntarily he looked around. The light of the hidden lamp in the hall fell in a pale, unbroken rectangle on the irregular porch. There was not the shifting of a pound's weight audible in the stillness.

Millie breathed unevenly; at times he saw she shivered uncontrollably. At this his feeling mounted beyond all restraint. He said, taking her cold hand: "I didn't tell you why I went last night

—it was because I was afraid to stay where you were; I was afraid of the change you were bringing about in my life. That's all over now, I——"

"Isn't it quite late?" she interrupted him uncomfortably. She rose and her agitation visibly increased.

He was about to force her to hear all that he must say, but he stopped at the mute wretchedness of her pallid face. He stood gazing up at her from the rough sod. She clenched her hands, her breast heaved sharply, and she spoke in a level, strained voice:

"It would have been better if you had gone—without coming back. My father is unhappy with anyone about except myself—and Nicholas. You see—he will not stay on the porch nor walk about his grounds. I am not in need of assistance, as you seem to think. And—thank you. Good night."

He stood without moving, his head thrown back, regarding her with a searching frown. He listened again, unconsciously, and thought he heard the low creaking of a board from within. It could be nothing but the uneasy peregrination of Lichfield Stope. The sound was repeated, grew louder, and the sagging bulk of Nicholas appeared in the doorway.

The latter stood for a moment, a dark, magnified shape; and then, moving across the portico to the farthest window, closed the shutters. The hinges gave out a rasping grind, as if they had not

been turned for months, and there was a faint rattle of falling particles of rusted iron. The man forced shut a second set of shutters with a sudden violence and went slowly back into the house. Millie Stope said once more:

"Good night."

It was evident to Woolfolk that he could gain nothing more at present; and stifling an angry protest, an impatient troop of questions, he turned and strode back to the tender. However, he hadn't the slightest intention of following Millie's indirectly expressed wish for him to leave. He had the odd conviction that at heart she did not want him to go; the evening, he elaborated this feeling, had been all a strange piece of acting. Tomorrow he would tear apart the veil that hid her from him; he would ignore her every protest and force the truth from her.

He lifted the tender's anchor from the sand and pulled sharply across the water to the *Gar*. A reddish, misshapen moon hung in the east, and when he had mounted to his deck it was suddenly obscured by a high, racing scud of cloud; the air had a damper, thicker feel. He instinctively moved to the barometer, which he found depressed. The wind, that had continued steadily since the night before, increased, and there was a corresponding stir among the branches ashore, a slapping of the yacht's cordage against the spars. He turned forward and half absently noted the increasing strain on the hawser disappearing into the dark tide. The

anchor was firmly bedded. The pervasive far murmur of the waves on the outer bars grew louder.

The yacht swung lightly over the choppy water, and a strong affection for the ketch that had been his home, his occupation, his solace through the past dreary years expanded his heart. He knew the *Gar's* every capability and mood, and they were all good. She was an exceptional boat. His feeling was acute, for he knew that the yacht had been superseded. It was already an element of the past, of that past in which Ellen lay dead in a tennis skirt, with a bright scarf about her young waist.

He placed his hand on the mainmast, in the manner in which another might drop a palm on the shoulder of a departing faithful companion, and the wind in the rigging vibrated through the wood like a sentient and affectionate response. Then he went resolutely down into the cabin, facing the future.

John Woolfolk woke in the night, listened for a moment to the straining hull and wind shrilling aloft, and then rose and went forward again to examine the mooring. A second hawser now reached into the darkness. Halvard had been on deck and put out another anchor. The wind beat salt and stinging from the sea, utterly dissipating the languorous breath of the land, the odors of the exotic, flowering trees.

IX

IN the morning a storm, driving out of the east, enveloped the coast in a frigid, lashing rain. The wind mounted steadily through the middle of the day with an increasing pitch accompanied by the basso of the racing seas. The bay grew opaque and seamed with white scars. After the meridian the rain ceased, but the wind maintained its volume, clamoring beneath a leaden pall.

John Woolfolk, in dripping yellow oilskins, occasionally circled the deck of his ketch. Halvard had everything in a perfection of order. When the rain stopped, the sailor dropped into the tender and with a boat sponge bailed vigorously. Soon after, Woolfolk stepped out upon the beach. He was without any plan but the determination to put aside whatever obstacles held Millie from him. This rapidly crystallized into the resolve to take her with him before another day ended. His feeling for her, increasing to a passionate need, had destroyed the suspension, the deliberate calm of his life, as the storm had dissipated the sunny peace of the coast.

He paused before the ruined façade, weighing her

will give him an answer tomorrow. Then at eight o'clock—it will be dark early tonight—walk out to the wharf. That is all. But it must be done without any hesitation; you must be even cheerful, kinder to him."

He was thinking: She must be out of the way when I meet Nicholas. She must not be subjected to the ordeal that will release her from the dread fast crushing her spirit.

She swayed, and he caught her, held her upright, circled in his steady arms.

"Don't let him hurt us," she gasped. "Oh, don't!"

"Not now," he reassurred her. "Nicholas is finished. But you must help by doing exactly as I have told you. You'd better go on. It won't be long, hardly three hours, until freedom."

She laid her cold cheek against his face, while her arms crept round his neck. She said nothing; and he held her to him with a sudden throb of feeling. They stood for a moment in the deepening gloom, bound in a straining embrace, while the rats gnawed in the sagging walls of the store and the storm thrashed without. She reluctantly descended the stair, crossed the broken floor and disappeared through the door.

A sudden unwillingness to have her return alone to the sobbing menace of Iscah Nicholas, the impotent wraith that had been Lichfield Stope, carried him in an impetuous stride to the stair. But there

tended period; Woolfolk could see his heavy, drooping shoulders and sunken head; and then the other moved to the left, crossing the rough open behind the oleanders. Woolfolk had a momentary glimpse of a huge nose and rapidly moving lips above an impotent chin.

Nicholas, he realized, remained a complete enigma to him; beyond the conviction that the man was, in some minor way, leaden-witted, he knew nothing.

A brief, watery ray of sunlight fell through a rift in the flying clouds and stained the tossing foliage pale gold; it was followed by a sudden drift of rain, then once more the naked wind. Woolfolk was fast determining to go up to the house and insist upon Millie's hearing him, when unexpectedly she appeared in a somber, fluttering cloak, with her head uncovered and hair blown back from her pale brow. He waited until she had passed him, and then rose, softly calling her name.

She stopped and turned, with a hand pressed to her heart. "I was afraid you'd gone out," she told him. "The sea is like a pack of wolves." Her voice was a low complexity of relief and fear.

"Not alone," he replied; "not without you."

"Madness," she murmured, gathering her wavering cloak about her breast. She swayed, graceful as a reed in the wind, charged with potency. He made an involuntary gesture toward her with his arms; but in a sudden accession of fear she eluded him.

"We must talk," he told her. "There is a great deal that needs explaining, that—I think—I have a right to know, the right of your dependence on something to save you from yourself. There is another right, but only you can give that——"

"Indeed," she interrupted tensely, "you mustn't stand here talking to me."

"I shall allow nothing to interrupt us," he returned decidedly. "I have been long enough in the dark."

"But you don't understand what you will, perhaps, bring on yourself—on me."

"I'm forced to ignore even that last."

She glanced hurriedly about. "Not here then, if you must."

She walked from him, toward the second ruined pile that fronted the bay. The steps to the gaping entrance had rotted away and they were forced to mount an insecure side piece. The interior, as Woolfolk had seen, was composed of one high room, while, above, a narrow, open second story hung like a ledge. On both sides were long counters with mounting sets of shelves behind them.

"This was the store," Millie told him. "It was a great estate."

A dim and moldering fragment of cotton stuff was hanging from a forgotten bolt; above, some tinware was eaten with rust; a scale had crushed in the floor and lay broken on the earth beneath; and a ledger, its leaves a single, sodden film of grey, was

still open on a counter. A precarious stair mounted to the flooring above, and Millie Stope made her way upward, followed by Woolfolk.

There, in the double gloom of the clouds and a small dormer window obscured by cobwebs, she sank on a broken box. The decayed walls shook perilously in the blasts of the wind. Below they could see the empty floor, and through the doorway the somber, gleaming greenery without.

All the patient expostulation that John Woolfolk had prepared disappeared in a sudden tyranny of emotion, of hunger for the slender, weary figure before him. Seating himself at her side, he burst into a torrential expression of passionate desire that mounted with the tide of his eager words. He caught her hands, held them in a painful grip, and gazed down into her still, frightened face. He stopped abruptly, was silent for a tempestuous moment, and then baldly repeated the fact of his love.

Millie Stope said:

"I know so little about the love you mean." Her voice trailed to silence; and in a lull of the storm they heard the thin patter of rats on the floor below, the stir of bats among the rafters.

"It's quickly learned," he assured her. "Millie, do you feel any response at all in your heart—the slightest return of my longing?"

"I don't know," she answered, turning toward him a troubled scrutiny. "Perhaps in another sur-

known element—the reason for her backward glances, her sudden, loud banalities, yesterday's mechanical repudiation of his offered assistance and the implied wish for him to go. He said gravely:

"I have been impatient, but you came so sharply into my empty existence that I was upset. If you are ill you can cure yourself. Never forget your mother's 'brave heart.' But there is something objective, immediate, threatening you. Tell me what it is, Millie, and together we will overcome and put it away from you for ever."

She gazed panic-stricken into the empty gloom below. "No! no!" she exclaimed, rising. "You don't know. I won't drag you down. You must go away at once, tonight, even in the storm."

"What is it?" he demanded.

She stood rigidly erect with her eyes shut and hands clasped at her sides. Then she slid down upon the box, lifting to him a white mask of fright.

"It's Nicholas," she said, hardly above her breath.

A sudden relief swept over John Woolfolk. In his mind he dismissed as negligible the heavy man fumbling beneath his soiled apron. He wondered how the other could have got such a grip on Millie Stope's imagination.

The mystery that had enveloped her was fast disappearing, leaving them without an obstacle to the happiness he proposed. Woolfolk said curtly:

"Has Nicholas been annoying you?"

"In this?" She indicated the wind beating with the blows of a great fist against the swaying sides of the demolished store. "Have you seen the sea? Do you remember what happened on the day I went with you when it was so beautiful and still?"

John Woolfolk realized, wakened to a renewed mental clearness by the threatening of all that he desired, that—as Millie had intimated—life was too complicated to be solved by a simple longing; love was not the all-powerful magician of conventional acceptance; there were other, no less profound, depths.

He resolutely abandoned his mere inchoate wanting, and considered the elements of the position that were known to him. There was, in the first place, that old, lamentable dereliction of Lichfield Stope's, and its aftermath in his daughter. Millie had just recalled to Woolfolk the duration, the activity, of its poison. Here there was no possibility of escape by mere removal; the stain was within; and it must be thoroughly cleansed before she could cope successfully, happily, with life. In this, he was forced to acknowledge, he could help her but little; it was an affair of spirit; and spiritual values—though they might be supported from without—had their growth and decrease strictly in the individual they animated.

Still, he argued, a normal existence, a sense of security, would accomplish a great deal; and that in turn hung upon the elimination of the second, un-

rounding, with things different, I might care for you very much——"

"I am going to take you into that other surrounding," he announced.

She ignored his interruption. "But we shall never have a chance to learn." She silenced his attempted protest with a cool, flexible palm against his mouth. "Life," she continued, "is so dreadfully in the dark. One is lost at the beginning. There are maps to take you safely to the Guianas, but none for souls. Perhaps religions are—— Again I don't know. I have found nothing secure—only a whirlpool into which I will not drag others."

"I will drag you out," he asserted.

She smiled at him, in a momentary tenderness, and continued: "When I was young I never doubted that I would conquer life. I pictured myself rising in triumph over circumstance, as a gull leaves the sea. . . . When I was young . . . If I was afraid of the dark then I thought, of course, I would outgrow it; but it has grown deeper than my courage. The night is terrible now." A shiver passed over her.

"You are ill," he insisted, "but you shall be cured."

"Perhaps, a year ago, something might have been done, with assistance; yes—with you. Then, whatever is, hadn't materialized. Why did you delay?" she cried in a sudden suffering.

"You'll go with me tonight," he declared stoutly.

"In this?" She indicated the wind beating with the blows of a great fist against the swaying sides of the demolished store. "Have you seen the sea? Do you remember what happened on the day I went with you when it was so beautiful and still?"

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The mystery that had enveloped her was fast disappearing, leaving them without an obstacle to the happiness he proposed. Woolfolk said curtly:

"Has Nicholas been annoying you?"

She shivered, with clasped straining hands. "He says he's crazy about me," she told him in a shuddering voice that contracted his heart. "He says that I must—must marry him, or——" Her period trailed abruptly out to silence.

Woolfolk grew animated with determination, an immediate purpose.

"Where would Nicholas be at this hour?" he asked.

She rose hastily, clinging to his arm. "You mustn't," she exclaimed, yet not loudly. "You don't know! He is watching — something frightful would happen."

"Nothing 'frightful,'" he returned tolerantly, preparing to descend. "Only unfortunate for Nicholas."

"You mustn't," she repeated desperately, her sheer weight hanging from her hands clasped about his neck. "Nicholas is not—not human. There's something funny about him. I don't mean funny, I——"

He unclasped her fingers and quietly forced her back to the seat on the box. Then he took a place at her side.

"Now," he asked reasonably, "what is this about Nicholas?"

She glanced down into the desolate cavern of the store; the ghostly remnant of cotton goods fluttered in a draft like a torn and grimy cobweb; the lower floor was palpably bare.

"He came in April," she commenced in a voice without any life. "The woman we had had for years was dead; and when Nicholas asked for work we were glad to take him. He wanted the smallest possible wages and was willing to do everything; he even cooked quite nicely. At first he was jumpy —he had asked if many strangers went by; but then when no one appeared he got easier. . . . He got easier and began to do extra things for me. I thanked him—until I understood. Then I asked father to send him away, but he was afraid; and, before I could get up my courage to do it, Nicholas spoke——

"He said he was crazy about me, and would I please try and be good to him. He had always wanted to marry, he went on, and live right, but things had gone against him. I told him that he was impertinent and that he would have to go at once; but he cried and begged me not to say that, not to get him 'started.' "

That, John Woolfolk recalled, was precisely what the man had said to him.

"I went back to father and told him why he must send Nicholas off, but father nearly suffocated. He turned almost black. Then I got frightened and locked myself in my room, while Nicholas sat out on the stair and sobbed all night. It was ghastly! In the morning I had to go down, and he went about his duties as usual.

"That evening he spoke again, on the porch, twisting his hands exactly as if he were making bread. He repeated that he wanted me to be nice to him. He said something wrong would happen if I pushed him to it.

"I think if he had threatened to kill me it would have been more possible than his hints and sobs. The thing went along for a month, then six weeks, and nothing more happened. I started again and again to tell them at the store, two miles back in the pines, but I could never get away from Nicholas; he was always at my shoulder, muttering and twisting his hands.

"At last I found something." She hesitated, glancing once more down through the empty gloom, while her fingers swiftly fumbled in the band of her waist.

"I was cleaning his room—it simply had to be done—and had out a bureau drawer, when I saw this underneath. He was not in the house, and I took one look at it, then put the things back as near as possible as they were. I was so frightened that I slipped it in my dress—had no chance to return it."

He took from her unresisting hand a folded rectangle of coarse grey paper; and, opening it, found a small handbill with the crudely reproduced photograph of a man's head with a long, drooping nose, sleepy eyes in thick folds of flesh, and a lax underlip with a fixed, dull smile:

WANTED FOR MURDER!

The authorities of Coweta offer THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS for the apprehension of the below, Iscah Nicholas, convicted of the murder of Elizabeth Slakto, an aged woman.

General description: Age about forty-eight. Head receding, with large nose and stupid expression. Body corpulent but strong. Nicholas has no trade and works at general utility. He is a homicidal maniac.

WANTED FOR MURDER!

"He told me that his name was Nicholas Brandt," Millie noted in her dull voice.

A new gravity possessed John Woolfolk.

"You must not go back to the house," he decided.

"Wait," she replied. "I was terribly frightened when he went up to his room. When he came down he thanked me for cleaning it. I told him he was mistaken, that I hadn't been in there, but I could see he was suspicious. He cried all the time he was cooking dinner, in a queer, choked way; and afterward touched me—on the arm. I swam, but all the water in the bay wouldn't take away the feel of his fingers. Then I saw the boat—you came ashore.

"Nicholas was dreadfully upset, and hid in the pines for a day or more. He told me if I spoke of

King Vidor's "Wild Oranges," A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY. *A Goldwyn Picture.*

him it would happen, and if I left it would happen —to father. Then he came back. He said that you were—were in love with me, and that I must send you away. He added that you must go today, for he couldn't stand waiting any more. He said that he wanted to be right, but that things were against him. This morning he got dreadful—if I fooled him he'd get you, and me, too, and then there was always father for something extra special. That, he warned me, would happen if I stayed away for more than an hour." She rose, trembling violently. "Perhaps it's been an hour now. I must go back."

John Woolfolk thought rapidly; his face was grim. If he had brought a pistol from the ketch he would have shot Iscah Nicholas without hesitation. Unarmed, he was reluctant to precipitate a crisis with such serious possibilities. He could secure one from the *Gar,* but even that short lapse of time might prove fatal—to Millie or Lichfield Stope. Millie's story was patently fact in every detail. He thought more rapidly still—desperately.

"I must go back," she repeated, her words lost in a sudden blast of wind under the dilapidated roof.

He saw that she was right.

"Very well," he acquiesced. "Tell him that you saw me, and that I promised to go tonight. Act quietly; say that you have been upset, but that you

will give him an answer tomorrow. Then at eight o'clock—it will be dark early tonight—walk out to the wharf. That is all. But it must be done without any hesitation; you must be even cheerful, kinder to him."

He was thinking: She must be out of the way when I meet Nicholas. She must not be subjected to the ordeal that will release her from the dread fast crushing her spirit.

She swayed, and he caught her, held her upright, circled in his steady arms.

"Don't let him hurt us," she gasped. "Oh, don't!"

"Not now," he reassurred her. "Nicholas is finished. But you must help by doing exactly as I have told you. You'd better go on. It won't be long, hardly three hours, until freedom."

She laid her cold cheek against his face, while her arms crept round his neck. She said nothing; and he held her to him with a sudden throb of feeling. They stood for a moment in the deepening gloom, bound in a straining embrace, while the rats gnawed in the sagging walls of the store and the storm thrashed without. She reluctantly descended the stair, crossed the broken floor and disappeared through the door.

A sudden unwillingness to have her return alone to the sobbing menace of Iscah Nicholas, the impotent wraith that had been Lichfield Stope, carried him in an impetuous stride to the stair. But there

he halted. The plan he had made held, in its simplicity, a larger measure of safety than any immediate, unconsidered course.

John Woolfolk waited until she had had time to enter the orange-grove; then he followed, turning toward the beach.

He found Halvard already at the sand's edge, waiting uneasily with the tender, and they crossed the broken water to where the *Gar's* cabin flung out a remote, peaceful light.

X

THE sailor immediately set about his familiar, homely tasks, while Woolfolk made a minute inspection of the ketch's rigging. He descended to supper with an expression of abstraction, and ate mechanically whatever was placed before him. Afterward he rolled a cigarette, which he neglected to light, and sat motionless, chin on breast, in the warm stillness.

Halvard cleared the table and John Woolfolk roused himself. He turned to the shelf that ran above the berths and secured a small, locked tin box. For an hour or more he was engaged alternately writing and carefully reading various papers sealed with vermilion wafers. Then he called Halvard.

"I'll get you to witness these signatures," he said, rising. Poul Halvard hesitated; then, with a furrowed brow, clumsily grasped the pen. "Here," Woolfolk indicated. The man wrote slowly, linking fortuitously the unsteady letters of his name. This arduous task accomplished, he immediately rose. John Woolfolk again took his place, turning to address the other, when he saw that one side of Halvard's face was bluish and rapidly swelling.

"What's the matter with your jaw?" he promptly inquired.

Halvard avoided his gaze, obviously reluctant to speak, but Woolfolk's silent interrogation was insistent. Then:

"I met that Nicholas," Halvard admitted; "without a knife."

"Well?" Woolfolk insisted.

"There's something wrong with this cursed place," Halvard said defiantly. "You can laugh, but there's a matter in the air that's not natural. My grandmother could have named it. She heard the ravens that called Tollfsen's death, and read Linga's eyes before she strangulated herself. Anyhow, when you didn't come back I got doubtful and took the tender in. Then I saw Nicholas beating up through the bushes, hiding here and there, and doubling through the grass; so I came on him from the back and—and kicked him, quite sudden.

"He went on his hands, but got up quick for a hulk like himself. Sir, this is hard to believe, but it's Biblical—he didn't take any more notice of the kick than if it had been a flag halyard brushed against him. He said 'Go away,' and waved his foolish hands.

"I closed in, still careful of the knife, with a remark, and got onto his heart. He only coughed and kept telling me in a crying whisper to go away. Nicholas pushed me back—that's how I got this

face. What was the use? I might as well have hit a pudding. Even talk didn't move him. In a little it sent me cold." He stopped abruptly, grew sullen; it was evident that he would say no more in that direction. Woolfolk opened another subject:

"Life, Halvard," he said, "is uncertain; perhaps tonight I shall find it absolutely unreliable. What I am getting at is this: if anything happens to me—death, to be accurate—the *Gar* is yours, the ketch and a sum of money. It is secured to you in this box, which you will deliver to my address in Boston. There is another provision that I'll mention merely to give you the opportunity to repeat it verbally from my lips: the bulk of anything I have, in the possibility we are considering, will go to a Miss Stope, the daughter of Lichfield Stope, formerly of Virginia." He stood up. "Halvard," Woolfolk said abruptly, extending his hand, expressing for the first time his repeated thought, "you are a good man. You are the only steady quantity I have ever known. I have paid you for a part of this, but the most is beyond dollars. That I am now acknowledging."

Halvard was cruelly embarrassed. He waited, obviously desiring a chance to retreat, and Woolfolk continued in a different vein:

"I want the canvas division rigged across the cabin and three berths made. Then get the yacht ready to go out at any time."

One thing more remained; and, going deeper in-

to the tin box, John Woolfolk brought out a packet of square envelopes addressed to him in a faded, angular hand. They were all that remained now of his youth, of the past. Not a ghost, not a remembered fragrance nor accent, rose from the delicate paper. They had been the property of a man dead twelve years ago, slain by incomprehensible mischance; and the man in the contracted cabin, vibrating from the elemental and violent forces without, forebore to open them. He burned the packet to a blackish ash on a plate.

It was, he saw from the chronometer, seven o'clock; and he rose charged with tense energy, engaged in activities of a far different order. He unwrapped from many folds of oiled silk a flat, amorphous pistol, uglier in its bleak outline than the familiar weapons of more graceful days; and, sliding into place a filled cartridge clip, he threw a load into the barrel. This he deposited in the pocket of a black wool jacket, closely buttoned about his long, hard body, and went up on deck.

Halvard, in a glistening yellow coat, came close up to him, speaking with the wind whipping the words from his lips. He said: "She's ready, sir."

For a moment Woolfolk made no answer; he stood gazing anxiously into the dark that enveloped and hid Millie Stope from him. There was another darkness about her, thicker than the mere night, like a black cerement dropping over her soul. His eyes narrowed as he replied to the sailor: "Good!"

XI

JOHN WOOLFOLK peered through the night toward the land.

"Put me ashore beyond the point," he told Halvard; "at a half-sunk wharf on the sea."

The sailor secured the tender, and, dropping into it, held the small boat steady while Woolfolk followed. With a vigorous push they fell away from the *Gar*. Halvard's oars struck the water smartly and forced the tender forward into the beating wind. They made a choppy passage to the rim of the bay, where, turning, they followed the thin, pale glimmer of the broken water on the land's edge. Halvard pulled with short, telling strokes, his oarblades stirring into momentary being livid blurs of phosphorescence.

John Woolfolk guided the boat about the point where he had first seen Millie swimming. He recalled how strange her unexpected appearance had seemed. It had, however, been no stranger than the actuality which had driven her into the bay in the effort to cleanse the stain of Iscah Nicholas' touch. Woolfolk's face hardened; he was suddenly conscious of the cold weight in his pocket. He

realized that he would kill Nicholas at the first opportunity and without the slightest hesitation.

The tender passed about the point, and he could hear more clearly the sullen clamor of the waves on the seaward bars. The patches of green sky had grown larger, the clouds swept by with the apparent menace of solid, flying objects. The land lay in a low, formless mass on the left. It appeared secretive, a masked place of evil. Its influence reached out and subtly touched John Woolfolk's heart with the premonition of base treacheries. The tormented trees had the sound of Iscah Nicholas sobbing. He must take Millie away immediately; banish its last memory from her mind, its influence from her soul. It was the latter he always feared, which formed his greatest hazard—to tear from her the tendrils of the invidious past.

The vague outline of the ruined wharf swam forward, and the tender slid into the comparative quiet of its partial protection.

"Make fast," Woolfolk directed. "I shall be out of the boat for a while." He hesitated; then: "Miss Stope will be here; and if, after an hour, you hear nothing from me, take her out to the ketch for the night. Insist on her going. If you hear nothing from me still, make the first town and report."

He mounted by a cross pinning to the insecure surface above; and, picking his way to solid earth, waited. He struck a match and, covering the light

with his palm, saw that it was ten minutes before eight. Millie, he had thought, would reach the wharf before the hour he had indicated. She would not at any cost be late.

The night was impenetrable. Halvard was as absolutely lost as if he had dropped, with all the world save the bare, wet spot where Woolfolk stood, into a nether region from which floated up great, shuddering gasps of agony. He followed this idea more minutely, picturing the details of such a terrestrial calamity; then he put it from him with an oath. Black thoughts crept insidiously into his mind like rats in a cellar. He had ordinarily a rigidly disciplined brain, an incisive logic, and he was disturbed by the distorted visions that came to him unbidden. He wished, in a momentary panic, instantly suppressed, that he were safely away with Millie in the ketch.

He was becoming hysterical, he told himself with compressed lips—no better than Lichfield Stope. The latter rose greyly in his memory, and fled across the sea, a phantom body pulsing with a veined fire like that stirred from the nocturnal bay. He again consulted his watch, and said aloud, incredulously: "Five minutes past eight." The inchoate crawling of his thoughts changed to an acute, tangible doubt, a mounting dread.

He rehearsed the details of his plan, tried it at every turning. It had seemed to him at the moment of its birth the best—no, the only—thing to do,

and it was still without obvious fault. Some trivial happening, an unforeseen need of her father's, had delayed Millie for a minute or two. But the minutes increased and she did not appear. All his conflicting emotions merged into a cold passion of anger. He would kill Nicholas without a word's preliminary. The time drew out, Millie did not materialize, and his anger sank to the realization of appalling possibilities.

He decided that he would wait no longer. In the act of moving forward he thought he heard, rising thinly against the fluctuating wind, a sudden cry. He stopped automatically, listening with every nerve, but there was no repetition of the uncertain sound. As Woolfolk swiftly considered it he was possessed by the feeling that he had not heard the cry with his actual ear but with a deeper, more unaccountable sense. He went forward in a blind rush, feeling with extended hands for the opening in the tangle, groping a stumbling way through the close dark of the matted trees. He fell over an exposed root, blundered into a chill, wet trunk, and finally emerged at the side of the desolate mansion. Here his way led through saw grass, waist high, and the blades cut at him like lithe, vindictive knives. No light showed from the face of the house toward him, and he came abruptly against the bay window of the dismantled billiard room.

A sudden caution arrested him—the sound of his approach might precipitate a catastrophe, and he

surroundings, would be inconvenient, perhaps impossible. He must try. He put the lamp back upon the table, moving it farther out of the eddy from the door, where it would stay lighted against a possible pressing need. Then he moved from the wan radiance into the night of the hall.

violence, for the cause of the other's death. At first he found nothing; then, as he moved the body—its lightness came to him as a shock—he saw that one fragile arm had been twisted and broken; the hand hung like a withered autumn leaf from its circular cuff fastened with the mosaic button. That was all.

He straightened up sharply, with his pistol levelled at the door. But there had been no noise other than that of the wind plucking at the old tin roof, rattling the shrunken frames of the windows. Lichfield Stope had fallen back with his countenance lying on a doubled arm, as if he were attempting to hide from his extinguished gaze the horror of his end. The lamp was of the common glass variety, without shade; and, in a sudden eddy of air, it flickered, threatened to go out, and a thin ribbon of smoke swept up against the chimney and vanished.

On the wall was a wide stipple print of the early nineteenth century—the smooth sward of a village glebe surrounded by the low stone walls of ancient dwellings, with a timbered inn behind broad oaks and a swinging sign. It was—in the print—serenely evening, and long shadows slipped out through an ambient glow. Woolfolk, with pistol elevated, became suddenly conscious of the withdrawn scene, and for a moment its utter peace held him spellbound. It was another world, for the security, the unattainable repose of which, he longed with a passionate bitterness.

The wind shifted its direction and beat upon the

front of the house; a different set of windows rattled, and the blast swept compact and cold up through the blank hall. John Woolfolk cursed his inertia of mind, and once more addressed the profound, tragic mystery that surrounded him.

He thought: Nicholas has gone—with Millie. Or perhaps he has left her—in some dark, upper space. A maddening sense of impotence settled upon him. If the man had taken Millie out into the night he had no chance of following, finding them. Impenetrable screens of bushes lay on every hand, with, behind them, mile after mile of shrouded pine woods.

His plan had gone terribly amiss, with possibilities which he could not bring himself to face. All that had happened before in his life, and that had seemed so insupportable at the time, faded to insignificance. Shuddering waves of horror swept over him. He raised his hand unsteadily, drew it across his brow, and it came away dripping wet. He was oppressed by the feeling familiar in evil dreams—of gazing with leaden limbs at deliberate, unspeakable acts.

He shook off the numbness of dread. He must act—at once! How? A thousand men could not find Iscah Nicholas in the confused darkness without. To raise the scattered and meager neighborhood would consume an entire day.

The wind agitated a rocking chair in the hall, an

erratic creaking responded, and Woolfolk started forward, and stopped as he heard and then identified the noise. This, he told himself, would not do; the hysteria was creeping over him again. He shook his shoulders, wiped his palm and took a fresh grip on the pistol.

Then from above came the heavy, unmistakable fall of a foot. It was not repeated; the silence spread once more, broken only from without. But there was no possibility of mistake, there had been no subtlety in the sound—a slow foot had moved, a heavy body had shifted.

At this actuality a new determination seized him; he was conscious of a feeling that almost resembled joy, an immeasurable relief at the prospect of action and retaliation. He took up the lamp, held it elevated while he advanced to the door with a ready pistol. There, however, he stopped, realizing the mark he would present moving, conveniently illuminated, up the stair. The floor above was totally unknown to him; at any turning he might be surprised, overcome, rendered useless. He had a supreme purpose to perform. He had already, perhaps fatally, erred, and there must be no further misstep.

John Woolfolk realized that he must go upstairs in the dark, or with, at most, in extreme necessity, a fleeting and guarded matchlight. This, too, since he would be entirely without knowledge of his

surroundings, would be inconvenient, perhaps impossible. He must try. He put the lamp back upon the table, moving it farther out of the eddy from the door, where it would stay lighted against a possible pressing need. Then he moved from the wan radiance into the night of the hall.

King Vidor's "Wild Oranges." *A Goldwyn Picture.*

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.

XII

HE formed in his mind the general aspect of the house: its width faced the orange grove, the stair mounted on the hall's right, in back of which a door gave to the billiard room; on the left was the chamber of the lamp, and that, he had seen, opened into a room behind, while the kitchen wing, carried to a chamber above, had been obviously added. It was probable that he would find the same general arrangement on the second floor. The hall would be smaller; a space inclosed for a bath; and a means of ascent to the roof.

John Woolfolk mounted the stair quickly and as silently as possible, placing his feet squarely on the body of the steps. At the top the handrail disappeared; and, with his back to a plaster wall, he moved until he encountered a closed door. That interior was above the billiard room; it was on the opposite floor he had heard the footfall, and he was certain that no one had crossed the hall or closed a door. He continued, following the dank wall. At places the plaster had fallen, and his fingers encountered the bare skeleton of the house. Farther on he narrowly escaped knocking down a heavily

framed picture—another, he thought, of Lichfield Stope's mezzotints—but he caught it, left it hanging crazily awry.

He passed an open door, recognized the bathroom from the flat odor of chlorides, reached an angle of the wall and proceeded with renewed caution. Next he encountered the cold panes of a window and then found the entrance to the room above the kitchen.

He stopped—it was barely possible that the sound he heard had echoed from here. He revolved the wisdom of a match, but—he had progressed very well so far—decided negatively. One aspect of the situation troubled him greatly—the absence of any sound or warning from Millie. It was highly improbable that his entrance to the house had been unnoticed. The contrary was probable—that his sudden appearance had driven Nicholas above.

Woolfolk started forward more hurriedly, urged by his increasing apprehension, when his foot went into the opening of a depressed step and flung him sharply forward. In his instinctive effort to avoid falling the pistol dropped clattering into the darkness. A sudden choked cry sounded beside him, and a heavy, enveloping body fell on his back. This sent him reeling against the wall, where he felt the muscles of an unwieldly arm tighten about his neck.

John Woolfolk threw himself back, when a wrist

heavily struck his shoulder and a jarring blow fell upon the wall. The hand, he knew, had held a knife, for he could feel it groping desperately over the plaster, and he put all his strength into an effort to drag his assailant into the middle of the floor.

It was impossible now to recover his pistol, but he would make it difficult for Nicholas to get the knife. The struggle in that way was equalized. He turned in the gripping arms about him and the men were chest to chest. Neither spoke; each fought solely to get the other prostrate, while Nicholas developed a secondary pressure toward the blade buried in the wall. This Woolfolk successfully blocked. In the supreme effort to bring the struggle to a decisive end neither dealt the other minor injuries. There were no blows—nothing but the straining pull of arms, the sudden weight of bodies, the cunning twisting of legs. They fought swiftly, whirling and staggering from place to place.

The hot breath of an invisible gaping mouth beat upon Woolfolk's cheek. He was an exceptionally powerful man. His spare body had been hardened by its years of exposure to the elements, in the constant labor he had expended on the ketch, the long contests with adverse winds and seas, and he had little doubt of his issuing successful from the present crisis. Iscah Nicholas, though his strength was beyond question, was heavy and slow. Yet he was struggling with surprising agility. He was animated by a convulsive energy, a volcanic out-

burst characteristic of the obsession of monomania.

The strife continued for an astonishing, an absurd, length of time. Woolfolk became infuriated at his inability to bring it to an end, and he expended an even greater effort. Nicholas' arms were about his chest; he was endeavoring by sheer pressure to crush Woolfolk's opposition, when the latter injected a mounting wrath into the conflict. They spun in the open like a grotesque human top, and fell. Woolfolk was momentarily underneath, but he twisted lithely uppermost. He felt a heavy, blunt hand leave his arm and feel, in the dark, for his face. Its purpose was to spoil, and he caught it and savagely bent it down and back; but a cruel forcing of his leg defeated his purpose.

This, he realized, could not go on indefinitely; one or the other would soon weaken. An insidious doubt of his ultimate victory lodged like a burr in his brain. Nicholas' strength was inhuman; it increased rather than waned. He was growing vindictive in a petty way—he tore at Woolfolk's throat, dug the flesh from his lower arm. Thereafter warm and gummy blood made John Woolfolk's grip insecure.

The doubt of his success grew; he fought more desperately. His thoughts, which till now had been clear, logically aloof, were blurred in blind spurts of passion. His mentality gradually deserted him; he reverted to lower and lower types of the human animal; during the accumulating seconds of the

strife he swung back through countless centuries to the primitive, snarling brute. His shirt was torn from a shoulder, and he felt the sweating, bare skin of his opponent pressed against him.

The conflict continued without diminishing. He struggled once more to his feet, with Nicholas, and they exchanged battering blows, dealt necessarily at random. Sometimes his arm swept violently through mere space, at others his fist landed with a satisfying shock on the body of his antagonist. The dark was occasionally crossed by flashes before Woolfolk's smitten eyes, but no actual light pierced the profound night of the upper hall. At times their struggle grew audible, smacking blows fell sharply; but there was no other sound except that of the wind tearing at the sashes, thundering dully in the loose tin roof, rocking the dwelling.

They fell again, and equally their efforts slackened, their grips became more feeble. Finally, as if by common consent, they rolled apart. A leaden tide of apathy crept over Woolfolk's battered body, folded his aching brain. He listened in a sort of indifferent attention to the tempestuous breathing of Iscah Nicholas. John Woolfolk wondered dully where Millie was. There had been no sign of her since he had fallen down the step and she had cried out. Perhaps she was dead from fright. He considered this possibility in a hazy, detached manner. She would be better dead—if he failed.

He heard, with little interest, a stirring on the

floor beside him, and thought with an overwhelming weariness and distaste that the strife was to commence once more. But, curiously, Nicholas moved away from him. Woolfolk was glad; and then he was puzzled for a moment by the sliding of hands over an invisible wall. He slowly realized that the other was groping for the knife he had buried in the plaster. John Woolfolk considered a similar search for the pistol he had dropped; he might even light a match. It was a rather wonderful weapon and would spray lead like a hose of water. He would like exceedingly well to have it in his hand with Nicholas before him.

Then in a sudden mental illumination he realized the extreme peril of the moment; and, lurching to his feet, he again threw himself on the other.

The struggle went on, apparently to infinity; it was less vigorous now; the blows, for the most part, were impotent. Iscah Nicholas never said a word; and fantastic thoughts wheeled through Woolfolk's brain. He lost all sense of the identity of his opponent and became convinced that he was combating an impersonal hulk—the thing that gasped and smeared his face, that strove to end him, was the embodied and evil spirit of the place, a place that even Halvard had seen was damnably wrong. He questioned if such a force could be killed, if a being materialized from the outer dark could be stopped by a pistol of even the latest, most ingenious mechanism.

They fell and rose, and fell. Woolfolk's fingers were twisted in a damp lock of hair; they came away—with the hair. He moved to his knees, and the other followed. For a moment they rested face to face, with arms limply clasped about the opposite shoulders. Then they turned over on the floor; they turned once more, and suddenly the darkness was empty beneath John Woolfolk. He fell down and down, beating his head on a series of sharp edges; while a second, heavy body fell with him, by turns under and above.

XIII

HE rose with the ludicrous alacrity of a man who had taken a public and awkward misstep. The wan lamplight, diffused from within, made just visible the bulk that had descended with him. It lay without motion, sprawling upon a lower step and the floor. John Woolfolk moved backward from it, his hand behind him, feeling for the entrance to the lighted room. He shifted his feet carefully, for the darkness was wheeling about him in visible black rings streaked with pale orange as he passed into the room.

Here objects, dimensions, became normally placed, recognizable. He saw the mezzotint with its sere and sunny peace, the portfolios on their stands, like grotesque and flattened quadrupeds, and Lichfield Stope on the floor, still hiding his dead face in the crook of his arm.

He saw these things, remembered them, and yet now they had new significance—they oozed a sort of vital horror, they seemed to crawl with a malignant and repulsive life. The entire room was charged with this palpable, sentient evil. John Woolfolk defiantly faced the still, cold inclosure; he was conscious of an unseen scrutiny, of a men-

ace that lived in pictures, moved the fingers of the dead, and that could take actual bulk and pound his heart sore.

He was not afraid of the wrongness that inhabited this muck of house and grove and matted bush. He said this loudly to the prostrate form; then, waiting a little, repeated it. He would smash the print with its fallacious expanse of peace. The broken glass of the smitten picture jingled thinly on the floor. Woolfolk turned suddenly and defeated the purpose of whatever had been stealthily behind him; anyway it had disappeared. He stood in a strained attitude, listening to the aberrations of the wind without, when an actual presence slipped by him, stopping in the middle of the floor.

It was Millie Stope. Her eyes were opened to their widest extent, but they had the peculiar blank fixity of the eyes of the blind. Above them her hair slipped and slid in a loosened knot.

"I had to walk round him," she protested in a low, fluctuating voice, "there was no other way. . . . Right by his head. My skirt——" She broke off and, shuddering, came close to John Woolfolk. "I think we'd better go away," she told him, nodding. "It's quite impossible here, with him in the hall, where you have to pass so close."

Woolfolk drew back from her. She too was a part of the house; she had led him there—a white flame that he had followed into the swamp. And

this was no ordinary marsh. It was, he added aloud, "A swamp of souls."

"Then," she replied, "we must leave at once."

A dragging sound rose from the hall. Millie Stope cowered in a voiceless accession of terror; but John Woolfolk, lamp in hand, moved to the door. He was curious to see exactly what was happening. The bulk had risen; a broad back swayed like a pendulum, and a swollen hand gripped the stair rail. The form heaved itself up a step, paused, tottering, and then mounted again. Woolfolk saw at once that the other was going for the knife buried in the wall above. He watched with an impersonal interest the dragging ascent. At the seventh step it ceased; the figure crumpled, slid halfway back to the floor.

"You can't do it," Woolfolk observed critically.

The other sat bowed, with one leg extended stiffly downward, on the stair that mounted from the pale radiance of the lamp into impenetrable darkness. Woolfolk moved back into the room and replaced the lamp on its table. Millie Stope still stood with open, hanging hands, a countenance of expectant dread. Her eyes did not shift from the door as he entered and passed her; her gaze hung starkly on what might emerge from the hall.

A deep loathing of his surroundings swept over John Woolfolk, a sudden revulsion from the dead man on the floor, from the ponderous menace on

the stair, the white figure that had brought it all upon him. A mounting horror of the place possessed him, and he turned and incontinently fled. A complete panic enveloped him at his flight, a blind necessity to get away, and he ran heedlessly through the night, with head up and arms extended. His feet struck upon a rotten fragment of board that broke beneath him, he pushed through a tangle of grass, and then his progress was held by soft and dragging sand. A moment later he was halted by a chill flood rising abruptly to his knees. He drew back sharply and fell on the beach, with his heels in the water of the bay.

An insuperable weariness pinned him down, a complete exhaustion of brain and body. A heavy wind struck like a wet cloth on his face. The sky had been swept clear of clouds, and stars sparkled in the pure depths of the night. They were white, with the exception of one that burned with an unsteady yellow ray and seemed close by. This, John Woolfolk thought, was strange. He concentrated a frowning gaze upon it—perhaps in falling into the soiled atmosphere of the earth it had lost its crystal gleam and burned with a turgid light. It was very, very probable.

He continued to watch it, facing the tonic wind, until with a clearing of his mind, a gasp of joyful recognition, he knew that it was the riding light of the *Gar*.

Woolfolk sat very still under the pressure of his

renewed sanity. Fact upon fact, memory on memory, returned, and in proper perspective built up again his mentality, his logic, his scattered powers of being. The *Gar* rode uneasily on her anchor chains; the wind was shifting. They must get away!—Halvard, waiting at the wharf—Millie——

He rose hurriedly to his feet—he had deserted Millie; left her, in all her anguish, with her dead parent and Iscah Nicholas. His love for her swept back, infinitely heightened by the knowledge of her suffering. At the same time there returned the familiar fear of a permanent disarrangement in her of chords that were unresponsive to the clumsy expedients of affection and science. She had been subjected to a strain that might well unsettle a relatively strong will; and she had been fragile in the beginning.

She must be a part of no more scenes of violence, he told himself, moving hurriedly through the orange grove; she must be led quietly to the tender —that is, if it were not already too late. His entire effort to preserve her had been a series of blunders, each one of which might well have proved fatal, and now, together, perhaps had.

He mounted to the porch and entered the hall. The light flowed undisturbed from the room on the right; and, in its thin wash, he saw that Iscah Nicholas had disappeared from the lower steps. Immediately, however, and from higher up, he heard

a shuffling, and could just make out a form heaving obscurely in the gloom. Nicholas patently was making progress toward the consummation of his one fixed idea; but Woolfolk decided that at present he could best afford to ignore him.

He entered the lighted room, and found Millie seated and gazing in dull wonderment at the figure on the floor.

"I must tell you about my father," she said conversationally. "You know, in Virginia, the women tied an apron to his door because he would not go to war, and for years that preyed on his mind, until he was afraid of the slightest thing. He was without a particle of strength—just to watch the sun cross the sky wearied him, and the smallest disagreement upset him for a week."

She stopped, lost in amazement at what she contemplated, what was to follow.

"Then Nicholas—— But that isn't important. I was to meet a man—we were going away together, to some place where it would be peaceful. We were to sail there. He said at eight o'clock. Well, at seven Nicholas was in the kitchen. I got father into his very heaviest coat, and laid out a muffler and his gloves, then sat and waited. I didn't need anything extra, my heart was quite warm. Then father asked why I had changed his coat—if I'd told him, he would have died of fright—he said he was too hot, and he fretted and worried. Nicholas heard him, and he wanted to know why I had

put on father's winter coat. He found the muffler and gloves ready and got suspicious.

"He stayed in the hall, crying a little—Nicholas cried right often—while I sat with father and tried to think of some excuse to get away. At last I had to go—for an orange, I said—but Nicholas wouldn't believe it. He pushed me back and told me I was going out to the other.

" 'Nicholas,' I said, 'don't be silly; nobody would come away from a boat on a night like this. Besides, he's gone away.' We had that last made up. But he pushed me back again. Then I heard father move behind us, and I thought—he's going to die of fright right now. But father's footsteps came on across the floor and up to my side.

" 'Don't do that, Nicholas,' he told him; 'take your hand from my daughter.' He swayed a little, his lips shook, but he stood facing him. It was father!" Her voice died away, and she was silent for a moment, gazing at the vision of that unsuspected and surprising courage. "Of course Nicholas killed him," she added. "He twisted him away and father died. That didn't matter," she told Woolfolk; "but the other was terribly important, anyone can see that."

John Woolfolk listened intently, but there was no sound from without. Then, with every appearance of leisure, he rolled and lighted a cigarette.

"Splendid!" he said of her recital; "and I don't doubt you're right about the important thing." He

moved toward her, holding out his hand. "Splendid! But we must go on—the man is waiting for you."

"It's too late," she responded indifferently. She redirected her thoughts to her parent's enthralling end. "Do you think a man as brave as that should lie on the floor?" she demanded. "A flag," she added obscurely, considering an appropriate covering for the still form.

"No, not on the floor," Woolfolk instantly responded. He bent and, lifting the body of Lichfield Stope, carried it into the hall, where, relieved at the opportunity to dispose of his burden, he left it in an obscure corner.

Iscah Nicholas was stirring again. John Woolfolk waited, gazing up the stair, but the other progressed no more than a step. Then he returned to Millie.

"Come," he said. "No time to lose." He took her arm and exerted a gentle pressure toward the door.

"I explained that it was too late," she reiterated, evading him. "Father really lived, but I died. 'Swamp of souls,'" she added in a lower voice. "Someone said that, and it's true; it happened to me."

"The man waiting for you will be worried," he suggested. "He depends absolutely on your coming."

"Nice man. Something had happened to him too.

He caught a rockfish and Nicholas boiled it in milk for our breakfast." At the mention of Iscah Nicholas a slight shiver passed over her. This was what Woolfolk hoped for—a return of her normal revulsion from her surroundings, from the past.

"Nicholas," he said sharply, contradicted by a faint dragging from the stair, "is dead."

"If you could only assure me of that," she replied wistfully. "If I could be certain that he wasn't in the next shadow I'd go gladly. Any other way it would be useless." She laid her hand over her heart. "I must get him out of here—— My father did. His lips trembled a little, but he said quite clearly: 'Don't do that. Don't touch my daughter.' "

"Your father was a singularly brave man," he assured her, rebelling against the leaden monotony of speech that had fallen upon them. "Your mother too was brave," he temporized. He could, he decided, wait no longer. She must, if necessary, be carried away forcibly. It was a desperate chance —the least pressure might result in a permanent, jangling discord. Her waist, torn, he saw, upon her pallid shoulder, was an insufficient covering against the wind and night. Looking about he discovered the muffler, laid out for her father, crumpled on the floor; and, with an arm about her, folded it over her throat and breast.

"Now we're away," he declared in a forced lightness.

King Vidor's "Wild Oranges." A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY. *A Goldwyn Picture.*

She resisted him for a moment, and then collapsed into his support.

John Woolfolk half led, half carried her into the hall. His gaze searched the obscurity of the stair; it was empty; but from above came the sound of a heavy, dragging step.

XIV

OUTSIDE she cowered pitifully from the violent blast of the wind, the boundless, stirred space. They made their way about the corner of the house, leaving behind the pale, glimmering rectangle of the lighted window. In the thicket Woolfolk was forced to proceed more slowly. Millie stumbled weakly over the rough way, apparently at the point of slipping to the ground. He felt a supreme relief when the cool sweep of the sea opened before him and Halvard emerged from the gloom.

He halted for a moment, with his arm about Millie's shoulders, facing his man. Even in the dark he was conscious of Poul Halvard's stalwart being, of his rocklike integrity.

"I was delayed," he said finally, amazed at the inadequacy of his words to express the pressure of the past hours. Had they been two or four? He had been totally unconscious of the passage of actual time. In the dark house behind the orange grove he had lived through tormented ages, descended into depths beyond the measured standard of Greenwich. Halvard said:

"Yes, sir."

The sound of a blundering progress rose from the

path behind them, the breaking of branches and the slipping of a heavy tread on the water-soaked ground. John Woolfolk, with an oath, realized that it was Nicholas, still animated by his fixed, murderous idea. Millie Stope recognized the sound, too, for she trembled violently on his arm. He knew that she could support no more violence, and he turned to the dim, square-set figure before him.

"Halvard, it's that fellow Nicholas. He's insane—has a knife. Will you stop him while I get Miss Stope into the tender? She's pretty well through." He laid his hand on the other's shoulder as he started immediately forward. "I shall have to go on, Halvard, if anything unfortunate occurs," he said in a different voice.

The sailor made no reply; but as Woolfolk urged Millie out over the wharf he saw Halvard throw himself upon a dark bulk that broke from the wood.

The tender was made fast fore and aft; and, getting down into the uneasy boat, Woolfolk reached up and lifted Millie bodily to his side. She dropped in a still, white heap on the bottom. He unfastened the painter and stood holding the tender close to the wharf, with his head above its platform, straining his gaze in the direction of the obscure struggle on land.

He could see nothing, and heard only an occasional trampling of the underbrush. It was difficult to remain detached, give no assistance, while Halvard encountered Iscah Nicholas. Yet with

Millie in a semi-collapse, and the bare possibility of Nicholas' knifing them both, he felt that this was his only course. Halvard was an unusually powerful, active man, and the other must have suffered from the stress of his long conflict in the hall.

The thing terminated speedily. There was the sound of a heavy fall, a diminishing thrashing in the saw grass, and silence. An indistinguishable form advanced over the wharf, and Woolfolk prepared to shove the tender free. But it was Poul Halvard. He got down, Woolfolk thought, clumsily, and mechanically assumed his place at the oars. Woolfolk sat aft, with an arm about Millie Stope. The sailor said fretfully:

"I stopped him. He was all pumped out. Missed his hand at first—the dark—a scratch."

He rested on the oars, fingering his shoulder. The tender swung dangerously near the corrugated rock of the shore, and Woolfolk sharply directed: "Keep way on her."

"Yes, sir," Halvard replied, once more swinging into his short, efficient stroke. It was, however, less sure than usual; an oar missed its hold and skittered impotently over the water, drenching Woolfolk with a brief, cold spray. Again the bow of the tender dipped into the point of land they were rounding, and John Woolfolk spoke more abruptly than before.

He was seriously alarmed about Millie. Her

face was apathetic, almost blank, and her arms hung across his knees with no more response than a doll's. He wondered desperately if, as she had said, her spirit had died; if the Millie Stope that had moved him so swiftly and tragically from his long indifference, his aversion to life, had gone, leaving him more hoplessly alone than before. The sudden extinction of Ellen's life had been more supportable than Millie's crouching dumbly at his feet. His arm unconsciously tightened about her, and she gazed up with a momentary, questioning flicker of her wide-opened eyes. He repeated her name in a deep whisper, but her head fell forward loosely, and left him in racking doubt.

Now he could see the shortly swaying riding light of the *Gar*. Halvard was propelling them vigorously but erratically forward. At times he re-muttered his declarations about the encounter with Nicholas. The stray words reached Woolfolk:

"Stopped him—the cursed dark—a scratch."

He brought the tender awkwardly alongside the ketch, with a grinding shock, and held the boats together while John Woolfolk shifted Millie to the deck. Woolfolk took her immediately into the cabin; where, lighting a swinging lamp, he placed her on one of the prepared berths and endeavored to wrap her in a blanket. But, in a shuddering access of fear, she rose with outheld palms.

"Nicholas!" she cried shrilly. "There—at the door!"

He sat beside her, restraining her convulsive effort to cower in a far, dark angle of the cabin.

"Nonsense!" he told her brusquely. "You are on the *Gar*. You are safe. In an hour you will be in a new world."

"With John Woolfolk?"

"I am John Woolfolk."

"But he—you—left me."

"I am here," he insisted with a tightening of his heart. He rose, animated by an overwhelming necessity to get the ketch under way, to leave at once, for ever, the invisible shore of the bay. He gently folded her again in the blanket, but she resisted him. "I'd rather stay up," she said with a sudden lucidity. "It's nice here; I wanted to come before, but he wouldn't let me."

A glimmer of hope swept over him as he mounted swiftly to the deck. "Get up the anchors," he called; "reef down the jigger and put on a handful of jib."

There was no immediate response, and he peered over the obscured deck in search of Halvard. The man rose slowly from a sitting posture by the main boom. "Very good, sir," he replied in a forced tone.

He disappeared forward, while Woolfolk, shutting the cabin door on the confusing illumination within, lighted the binnacle lamp, bent over the engine, swiftly making connections and adjustments, and cranked the wheel with a sharp, expert turn.

The explosions settled into a dull, regular succession, and he coupled the propeller and slowly maneuvered the ketch up over the anchors, reducing the strain on the hawsers and allowing Halvard to get in the slack. He waited impatiently for the sailor's cry of all clear, and demanded the cause of the delay.

"The bight slipped," the other called in a muffled, angry voice. "One's clear now," he added. "Bring her up again." The ketch forged ahead, but the wait was longer than before. "Caught," Halvard's voice drifted thinly aft; "coral ledge." Woolfolk held the *Gar* stationary until the sailor cried weakly: "Anchor's apeak."

They moved inperceptibly through the dark, into the greater force of the wind beyond the point. The dull roar of the breaking surf ahead grew louder. Halvard should have had the jib up and been aft at the jigger, but he failed to appear. John Woolfolk wondered, in a mounting impatience, what was the matter with the man. Finally an obscure form passed him and hung over the housed sail, stripping its cover and removing the stops. The sudden thought of a disconcerting possibility banished Woolfolk's annoyance. "Halvard," he demanded, "did Nicholas knife you?"

"A scratch," the other stubbornly reiterated. "I'll tie it up later. No time now—I stopped him permanent."

The jigger, reefed to a mere irregular patch, rose

with a jerk, and the ketch rapidly left the protection of the shore. She dipped sharply and, flattened over by a violent ball of wind, buried her rail in the black, swinging water, and there was a small crash of breaking china from within. The wind appeared to sweep high up in empty space and occasionally descend to deal the yacht a staggering blow. The bar, directly ahead—as Halvard had earlier pointed out—was now covered with the smother of a lowering tide. The pass, the other had discovered, too, had filled. It was charted at four feet, the *Gar* drew a full three, and Woolfolk knew that there must be no error, no uncertainty, in running out.

Halvard was so long in stowing away the jigger shears that Woolfolk turned to make sure that the sailor had not been swept from the deck. The "scratch," he was certain, was deeper than the other admitted. When they were safely at sea he would insist upon an examination.

The subject of this consideration fell rather than stepped into the cockpit, and stood rocked by the motion of the swells, clinging to the cabin's edge. Woolfolk shifted the engine to its highest speed, and they were driving through the tempestuous dark on to the bar. He was now confronted by the necessity for an immediate decision. Halvard or himself would have to stand forward, clinging precariously to a stay, and repeatedly sound the depth of the shallowing water as they felt their way out

to sea. He gazed anxiously at the dark bulk before him, and saw that the sailor had lost his staunchness of outline, his aspect of invincible determination.

"Halvard," he demanded again sharply, "this is no time for pretense. How are you?"

"All right," the other repeated desperately, through clenched teeth. "I've—I've taken knives from men before—on the docks at Stockholm. I missed his hand at first—it was the night."

The cabin door swung open, and a sudden lurch flung Millie Stope against the wheel. Woolfolk caught and held her until the wave rolled by. She was stark with terror, and held abjectly to the rail while the next swell lifted them upward. He attempted to urge her back to the protection of the cabin, but she resisted with such a convulsive determination that he relinquished the effort and enveloped her in his glistening oilskin.

This had consumed a perilous amount of time; and, swiftly decisive, he commanded Halvard to take the wheel. He swung himself to the deck and secured the long sounding pole. He could see ahead on either side the dim white bars forming and dissolving, and called to the man at the wheel:

"Mark the breakers! Fetch her between."

On the bow, leaning out over the surging tide, he drove the sounding pole forward and down, but it floated back free. They were not yet on the bar. The ketch heeled until the black plain of water

rose above his knees, driving at him with a deceitful force, sinking back slowly as the yacht straightened buoyantly. He again sounded; the pole struck bottom, and he cried:

"Five."

The infuriated beating of the waves on the obstruction drawn across their path drowned his voice, and he shouted the mark once more. Then after another sounding:

"Four and three."

The yacht fell away dangerously before a heavy diagonal blow; she hung for a moment, rolling like a log, and then slowly regained her way. Woolfolk's apprehension increased. It would, perhaps, have been better if they had delayed, to examine Halvard's injury. The man had insisted that it was of no moment, and John Woolfolk had been driven by a consuming desire to leave the miasmatic shore. He swung the pole forward and cried:

"Four and a half."

The water was shoaling rapidly. The breaking waves on the port and starboard swept by with lightning rapidity. The ketch veered again, shipped a crushing weight of water, and responded more slowly than before to a tardy pressure of the rudder. The greatest peril, John Woolfolk knew, lay directly before them. He realized from the action of the ketch that Halvard was steering uncertainly, and that at any moment the *Gar* might

strike and fall off too far for recovery, when she could not live in the pounding surf.

"Four and one," he cried hoarsely. And then immediately after: "Four."

Chance had been against him from the first, he thought, and there flashed through his mind the dark panorama, the accumulating disasters of the night. A negation lay upon his existence that would not be lifted. It had followed him like a sinister shadow for years to this obscure, black smother of water, to the *Gar* reeling crazily forward under an impotent hand. The yacht was behaving heroically; no other ketch could have lived so long, responded so gallantly to a wavering wheel.

"Three and three," he shouted above the combined stridor of wind and sea.

The next minute would see their safe passage or a helpless hulk beating to pieces on the bar, with three human fragments whirling under the crushing masses of water, floating, perhaps, with the dawn into the tranquillity of the bay.

"Three and a half," he cried monotonously.

The *Gar* trembled like a wounded and dull animal. The solid seas were reaching hungrily over Woolfolk's legs. A sudden stolidity possessed him. He thrust the pole out deliberately, skillfully:

"Three and a quarter."

A lower sounding would mean the end. He paused for a moment, his dripping face turned to the far stars; his lips moved in silent, unformu-

lated aspirations—Halvard and himself, in the sea that had been their home; but Millie was so fragile! He made the sounding precisely, between the heaving swells, and marked the pole instantly driven backward by their swinging flight.

"Three and a half." His voice held a new, uncontrollable quiver. He sounded again immediately: "And three-quarters."

They had passed the bar.

XV

A GLADNESS like the white flare of burning powder swept over him, and then he became conscious of other, minor sensations—his head ached intolerably from the fall down the stair, and a grinding pain shot through his shoulder, lodging in his torn lower arm at the slightest movement. He slipped the sounding pole into its loops on the cabin and hastily made his way aft to the relief of Poul Halvard.

The sailor was nowhere visible; but, in an intermittent, reddish light that faded and swelled as the cabin door swung open and shut, Woolfolk saw a white figure clinging to the wheel—Millie.

Instantly his hands replaced hers on the spokes and, as if with a palpable sigh of relief, the *Gar* steadied to her course. Millie Stope clung to the deck rail, sobbing with exhaustion.

"He's—he's dead!" she exclaimed, between her racking inspirations. She pointed to the floor of the cockpit, and there, sliding grotesquely with the motion of the seaway, was Poul Halvard. An arm was flung out, as if in ward against the ketch's side, but it crumpled, the body hit heavily, a hand seemed

to clutch at the boards it had so often and thoroughly swabbed; but without avail. The face momentarily turned upward; it was haggard beyond expression, and bore stamped upon it, in lines that resembled those of old age, the agonized struggle against the inevitable last treachery of life.

"When——" John Woolfolk stopped in sheer, leaden amazement.

"Just when you called 'Three and a quarter.' Before that he had fallen on his knees. He begged me to help him hold the wheel. He said you'd be lost if I didn't. He talked all the time about keeping her head up and up. I helped him. Your voice came back years apart. At the last he was on the floor, holding the bottom of the wheel. He told me to keep it steady, dead ahead. His voice grew so weak that I couldn't hear; and then all at once he slipped away. I—I held on—called to you. But against the wind——"

He braced his knee against the wheel and, leaning out, found the jigger sheet and flattened the reefed sail; he turned to where the jib sheet led after, and then swung the ketch about. The yacht rode smoothly, slipping forward over the long, even ground swell, and he turned with immeasurable emotion to the woman beside him.

The light from the cabin flooded out over her face, and he saw that, miraculously, the fear had gone. Her countenance was drawn with weariness and the hideous strain of the past minutes, but her

gaze squarely met the night and sea. Her chin was lifted, its graceful line firm, and her mouth was in repose. She had, as he had recognized she alone must, conquered the legacy of Lichfield Stope; while he, John Woolfolk, and Halvard, had put Nicholas out of her life. She was free.

"If you could go below——" he suggested. "In the morning, with this wind, we'll be at anchor under a fringe of palms, in water like a blue silk counterpane."

"I think I could now, with you," she replied. She pressed her lips, salt and enthralling, against his face, and made her way into the cabin. He locked the wheel momentarily and, following, wrapped her in the blankets, on the new sheets prepared for her coming. Then, putting out the light, he shut the cabin door and returned to the wheel.

The body of Poul Halvard struck his feet and rested there. A good man, born by the sea, who had known its every expression; with a faithful and simple heart, as such men occasionally had.

The diminished wind swept in a clear diapason through the pellucid sky; the resplendent sea reached vast and magnetic to its invisible horizon. A sudden distaste seized John Woolfolk for the dragging death ceremonials of land. Halvard had known the shore mostly as a turbulent and unclean strip that had finally brought about his end.

He leaned forward and found beyond any last doubt that the other was dead; a black, clotted sur-